

REJOINDER TO REPLIES BY CLARK H. PINNOCK, JOHN SANDERS, AND GREGORY A. BOYD

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I wish to express my appreciation to the editor of the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* for his willingness to publish my ETS paper along with these replies and rejoinder. Furthermore, I am grateful for the thoughtful and rigorous responses from Greg Boyd, Clark Pinnock, and John Sanders. In this limited space, I will offer general comments in three areas followed by several brief specific points of engagement.

I. GENERAL COMMENTS

1. *Legitimacy of this criticism.* I am grateful to Pinnock and nonplused by Boyd at their respective statements on the legitimacy of the criticism undertaken in my ETS presentation. Pinnock notes his opinion that the focus on implications of the distinctive openness view of divine foreknowledge and the resultant place open theism should have within or outside of evangelicalism is “legitimate,” since this distinctive position is, as he writes, “a novel aspect of our view which attracts attention.” Boyd, on the other hand, asserts that “it seems misguided and unchristian to move to brand a position as ‘non-evangelical’ because some cannot understand how they avoid certain negative implications they think their theology implies.” This is a matter of critical importance, so permit me a few responses.

First, apparently Pinnock senses what Boyd misses, and that is the gravity of the openness proposal that would deny of God what has been affirmed and cherished by Christians for many centuries. For countless generations and millions of Christian believers, great strength and hope has been founded on the truth that God knows every detail of what will happen in the future. Even though we are blind to just what tomorrow or next year or the distant future might bring, we may hold the hand of the One who sees that future perfectly and truthfully, in all of its vast and exhaustive (and, yes, definite) detail, and follow him unquestioningly as he directs us and charts the course of our lives. Christian theology has said that this view is essential to our understanding of God, and Christian faith has leaned on it during dark and stormy days. The openness denial of God’s exhaustive knowledge of all that will occur in the future presents a modification to Christian doctrine and faith that is enormously weighty and sobering.

Care must be taken to see just what comes with this denial. If we fail to probe as accurately and fully as possible just what implications this doctrinal innovation brings, and we pass this view on to our churches and children

only later to realize attending problems, we may be responsible for hurting the very ones we are charged to nurture in the faith, and we surely will be accountable before God for this negligence and this failure. Furthermore, if the Evangelical Theological Society cannot be a place where perceived serious negative implications of enormous proportion for the life and faith of the church can be evaluated, how well can this organization rightly claim to serve the church?

Second, do not many groups “brand” other positions as unacceptable owing, in part, to implications *they see* that follow from other’s views, *even when advocates of those other views offer their explanations*? As Boyd himself mentions, Calvinism is rejected by many Arminians *in part* because of implications they think follow, *even though* Calvinists offer (unsatisfying, to Arminians) explanations. Or, to cite a vivid current example, in Sanders’s reply, he clearly rejects classic Arminianism’s view of simple foreknowledge *in part* because of the implication that it does not, in his judgment, provide God any providential benefit, *despite the fact* that David Hunt (whom Sanders cites) has offered a recent explanation of how simple foreknowledge does give God providential advantage. The point is this: We commonly do “brand a position” as misguided and unacceptable because we “cannot understand how they avoid certain negative implications” that we argue (and insist) that they have, *despite the fact that they may offer* (unsatisfactory, in our judgment) *explanations*. What this paper seeks to do, then, is *not different in kind* from much other common and acceptable criticism. The only difference with this paper is in its judgment as to the weightiness of the implications noted and the severity of this doctrinal departure for the health and life of the evangelical church—which raises my last comment on the legitimacy of this critique.

Third, please recall that this paper was delivered by the request and invitation of the executive board and program chairman of ETS, and that the title and purpose of the paper were already formulated when I was asked to prepare and read it. I did not select either the title or the mandate of the paper, nor did John Sanders, who read a paper with an identical title. So, when given the assignment to answer the question, “Is open theism evangelical?” I searched my soul, and probed the open view as carefully and prayerfully as I could, and then answered this question in the manner you can see in the paper’s last pages. Having said that I did not select either the title or mandate of this paper, please understand, however, that I accepted this assignment soberly yet gladly, because it afforded the opportunity to put on display implications of the open view that I believe must be considered seriously by all of us who think theology ought to be for the life, health, and well-being of the church, to the glory of God alone. Please understand: I did not arrive quickly or lightly at my negative answer to the question, “Is open theism evangelical?” Nor do I believe that this negative judgment should rightly apply to a host of other theological differences among us in the ETS. But the issues here are so grave, the departure from the historic understanding of Scripture’s teaching so central, and the implications so

many and serious, that before God and in good conscience, I have given the answer to this question I believe is both right and necessary.

2. *On dealing with the question of boundaries.* If I read Boyd and Sanders correctly, no theological position *can ever be rejected*, nor can any view *ever be deemed outside the bounds of evangelicalism*, no matter how seriously some might think its deficiencies or errors are. Are Boyd and Sanders saying this? Consider: Just prior to Boyd's "Closing Word," he suggests that his own reply may have served "to demonstrate the need for restraint in moving to brand a theology as 'non-evangelical' on the basis of what an *outsider to the system* thinks are its negative theological and practical consequences" (emphasis added). Sanders, similarly, in his introductory remarks suggests that criticism goes wrong in cases when the critic "simply does not understand *from the inside* the position he is criticizing" (emphasis added).

Now, this is so painfully obvious that I hesitate to mention it, but for the sake of clarity, please consider this question: If *outsiders* to some view are disqualified—by virtue of their "outsider" position—to offer what could rightly be construed as legitimate criticism of another's view, and if *insiders* to that view—though qualified to offer criticism of their own view, by virtue of their "insider" position—offer in fact only justifications and explanations of the legitimacy of their own view (because, after all, they are insiders!), then *how will any position ever be rejected*, and *how might evangelicalism ever decide that some view or other is outside its bounds*? Surely, outsiders must work hard to understand another's position as accurately and fairly as possible. But having done this, if outsiders do not call attention to problems, and especially if they are disqualified from doing so owing to their "outsider" position, genuine critique can never be conducted, serious evaluation can never be offered, and views become insulated from even possible rejection.

Pinnock, while he expresses the legitimacy of this external critique, ends his reply by sounding a warning "not to define the boundaries of evangelicalism too narrowly." Because evangelicalism is a family of denominations and theologies, and because "fresh thinking on Scripture" constantly occurs, "the boundaries keep changing" and so evangelicalism must be broad. But, is it not interesting that in Pinnock's vision of big-tent evangelicalism, the boundaries seem always to change by expansion, but never by contraction? In principle, should we follow this model? Granted, it is always easier to welcome a new friend than it is to confront and exhort an old one; pastors would much rather add a wedding to the church calendar than an upcoming congregational meeting over an issue of church discipline. Clearly our culture promotes values of inclusion, tolerance, and acceptance, while holding firmly to "exclusive truths" is frowned upon and, at times, despised. But are there not times when faithfulness to God, Scripture, and divine calling require the harder course of drawing the lines and calling something out of bounds? If Pinnock fears (and rightly so) that "dealing harshly with open

theists will create a chill in our gatherings,” no doubt an equally viable fear is that our deep reluctance to draw such lines sets up the implicit adoption of a default acceptance of theological innovation within our society, allowing for (and perhaps encouraging!) the entrance and establishment of fundamentally wrong and harmful views, views that are in fact contrary to our evangelical identity. So, is there ever a time to say “no”? On this issue, this much is clear: While kind and charitable treatment of “open theists” is essential, also essential is the legitimacy to pose the question of whether “open theism” should rightly be viewed as acceptable within our society, our denominations, and our schools.

3. *Veiled critique of Arminianism?* Both Boyd and especially Sanders suggest that many of the paper’s implications of the openness denial of exhaustive divine (definite, *à la* Boyd) foreknowledge are just as rightly directed toward classic Arminianism. If so, of course, the force and conclusion of the paper would have to apply to Arminianism more generally, not just to open theism specifically. And if so, then, it should be clear to all that this is really a veiled attempt to discredit Arminianism (i.e. all forms of freewill theism) and to establish Calvinism as the only viable model for the ETS. Since this contains a theological and a political charge, allow me to speak briefly to each.

Regarding the theological charge, readers will have to judge, but here is my claim: as stated and explained, every one of my twenty-six implications applies to open theism exclusively, whereas none applies to other versions of freewill theism (e.g. classic Arminianism, Molinism). Every implication has specifically and deliberately in view what follows when one denies that God knows exhaustively all that will take place in the future, because he cannot know, in particular, the future choices and actions of free creatures. Since all other forms of freewill theism hold what is here denied in open theism, I focused deliberately and consciously on this distinctive openness doctrinal denial in framing each and every implication.

Despite this intention, Sanders and Boyd claim that many of my criticisms apply to Arminianism, but I do not accept their judgment. For example, Sanders says that my complaint with open theism over God’s perfect wisdom has to do with whether “God’s actions always have their intended results.” But this is *not* my specific complaint. Granted, Arminianism generally holds that, due to libertarian freedom, God sometimes allows human actions to take place that he does not—in some sense—want (and, for that matter, Calvinism’s “two wills in God” doctrine allows for a version of the same position). But my specific criticism of open theism is different. My fourth point under “God: his character, purposes, and work” calls into question the perfect wisdom of a God who “sometimes looks back at his own past decisions and now, in retrospect, determines that what he previously decided may not in fact have been the best decision.” In classic Arminianism, God *never* faces this problem; in his relationships with his creatures, he *always knows in advance*, and even decides based (in part) on his exhaustive foreknowledge, what will be the outcome of his own decisions and actions,

and what he will or will not allow to happen in the unfolding history of his moral creatures. What is unique to open theism (aligning it with process theism, on this point) is God *learning now, in this moment as choices are made and actions are performed*, that perhaps what he thought would be best turns out, in retrospect, not so to have been.

Or again, Sanders says that Arminianism succumbs as well to my criticism that salvation in open theism could at best be a “contingency plan” for God. But Sanders misconstrues my point and, by making a *different point than the one I make*, turns it into a criticism against Arminianism. My point is that Scripture teaches (1 Pet 1:19–20 and Rev 13:8; cf. Eph 1:4) that *God’s saving purpose and plan is settled in eternity past, before the creation of the world*, unlike the openness view, in which, until sin occurs in the garden, God could not know with certainty sin would be committed and hence could have planned with certainty his redeeming work in Christ *before the foundation of the world*. Granted, in classic Arminianism and Calvinism there are proposed various logical orderings relating to the formation of God’s eternal creation and redemption purposes. But what is true for all historic views affirming exhaustive divine foreknowledge is that they hold, according to Scripture, that *prior to creation, God knows certainly and has planned fully for all that will occur in the upcoming history of the world* he is about to create. This fact is impossible to affirm in open theism, and as such, the open view stands against both all historic views and—more importantly—against Scripture’s clear teaching.

Beyond these specific responses, I believe there are two main reasons that Boyd and Sanders think that particular criticisms I make apply equally to Arminianism. First, bear in mind that Boyd and Sanders reject classic Arminianism because they reject some central Arminian defenses for the viability of its view. And as such, Boyd and Sanders have concluded that Arminianism—as *they have critiqued it*—also cannot account for some features that I claim are inexplicable in open theism (e.g. passages indicating God’s definite knowledge of future free actions, or reliable divine guidance for believers). So when I argue that open theism’s denial of exhaustive divine foreknowledge makes it unable to account for certain features, *because Boyd and Sanders have in mind their “corrected” form of Arminianism*, therefore, they claim that if my argument applies to open theism *it must also apply equally to Arminianism*.

For example, in the second point of his “Worthless Idolatry” section, Boyd states that *if the only way to account for exhaustive definite foreknowledge is as God “meticulously controls the whole of history,”* then it follows that criticizing open theism here “counts against Arminianism as well.” But is this fair? Certainly I never dispute the fact that Arminians claim that God has exhaustive definite foreknowledge *without* meticulous control over history, and although I do not hold their position, I accept it as a defensible view. But, *open theists* have pressed the point that, contrary to classic Arminianism, God cannot know future (libertarian) free actions of his moral creatures. So, Boyd’s claim that my criticism applies just as much to Arminianism is only of the type of Arminianism *he thinks is viable*

(i.e. the chastened and corrected “Arminianism” that admits that divine determination is the only basis for affirming exhaustive definite foreknowledge), but not the actual Arminianism defended by actual classic Arminians themselves.

Several of Sanders’s objections could be offered also, but for one, consider his ninth point. Here he says that my criticism that divine guidance in open theism is less than fully reliable applies equally to Arminianism. But notice that the “Arminianism” to which my criticism is said to apply is, alas, the corrected form of “Arminianism” in which divine foreknowledge provides God no providential benefit (contra David Hunt, whose view Sanders rejected in point 4 of his reply). Another simple way to see this point is this: when Arminianism accepts the openness critique against it and adopts the open view as the *de facto*, true, and only really viable Arminian view (!), then the criticisms that I make against open theism will equally apply to Arminianism.

Second, Boyd and Sanders unjustifiably import notions of comprehensive divine control or sovereignty into what I say in order to make it appear that my complaints of open theism apply equally to Arminianism, where comprehensive sovereignty (as in Calvinism) is denied. I believe this is an unfair and prejudiced reading of my ETS paper. Where, in my paper, do I argue, as Sanders claims, that “a God lacking exhaustive definite foreknowledge would not be able to *guarantee the results* he wants to see in our lives” (emphasis added)? I certainly do say that the openness God *cannot know* for sure what results will occur from present actions, or just what purposes may be served from hardships. But these are *not* problems faced in classic Arminianism, where God *knows fully and certainly* all that the future holds and what consequences follow from any and every action and event. So, I will leave it to readers to evaluate if Sanders is even remotely correct (and Boyd makes a similar claim) when, in his conclusion, he says, “Ware has a number of criticisms but one main one—all forms of freewill theism sacrifice exhaustive divine control and thus the ability of God to guarantee the results. . . .” This evaluation strikes me, the author of the paper, as so far from the truth that as a description of *this paper*, it is unrecognizable. I do not dispute that I personally hold to God’s comprehensive sovereignty over all he has made, but what I reject is the suggestion that this doctrine stands behind much (or any!) of the implications I raise in this paper. Sanders and Boyd, however, surely would like to see my paper as a veiled critique of Arminianism, so that they could show that the *real* subjects of these criticisms are open theists *with Arminians*. Certainly, they *assert* this is the case, but they do not *prove* their assertion, and I believe their assertion to be unfounded. The fact is, my paper is a conscious, deliberate, intentional effort to expose implications of the most notable distinguishing doctrine of open theism (in contrast to all historic Christian views), so that open theism stands for review here *all on its own*. Envisioning it as holding hands with Arminianism is absolutely contrary to my conscious efforts, but readers may evaluate whether and to what extent my efforts have succeeded.

Regarding the political charge, before God, and before you, my colleagues, I hereby express my conviction that I harbored absolutely *no* inappropriate, wrongful, or devious political agenda that I sought to serve with this paper. My intentions in the paper are clear for any and all to see. I believed then, as I do now, that open theism's denial of what Scripture teaches and what all historic views affirm constitutes a departure that is biblically, theologically, and practically so serious in nature, that Christian leaders should declare open theism unacceptable as a viable, legitimate model within evangelicalism. That is, because the theological problems with open theism are sufficiently weighty, a call to the broader evangelical church to take a stand in rejecting the openness proposal is not only justified, but, before God and in clear conscience, required. As I say in my conclusion, "to fail to challenge a proposal as massive in its harmful implications for theology and for the church as found in the openness proposal would be utterly irresponsible, and by its neglect, our failure would constitute complicity in the harmful effects these doctrinal innovations have for our evangelical theology and for the life of the church."

Now, is it legitimate to urge this conclusion upon others? Clearly Boyd and Sanders think not. Recall that Boyd assesses my critique and its rejection of the openness model as "misguided and unchristian." Furthermore, Boyd charges that "the alarmist and inflammatory language of the essay [by the way, which ETS plenary speaker was it who said that his opponents risked becoming the "evangelical Taliban"?] was quite appropriate and masterfully constructed" due to a desire to score a political "win." My response to this is twofold: First, while God knows the motives of my heart perfectly, Dr. Boyd knows nothing of my own inner heart; yet he speaks here authoritatively and judgmentally, as if he does, but his charges suggest something about my motives and actions that are both deeply hurtful and absolutely wrong. What I wanted to demonstrate above all is the fully unacceptable theological implications of open theism. With these in view, then certainly the question of whether open theism belongs legitimately within evangelicalism is unavoidable! Furthermore, while it is unmistakably true that I sought to be used by God to convince people that open theism is out of bounds, is it not clear that John Sanders's paper was designed to convince people of open theism's legitimacy? Is either approach more or less "political" than the other?

Second, if we conclude that it is "misguided and unchristian" to attempt to demonstrate that a particular theological position is out of bounds, how can serious theological criticism be conducted within a society, a church, a denomination, an institution? How can any position ever be ruled out? What will safeguard us from doctrinal deviations that will imperil the integrity of evangelicalism and its churches and schools? No, I utterly reject these appeals by open theists to the supposedly "politicized" and "unchristian" manner of this criticism. Such charges by Boyd and Sanders function as diversionary tactics that would, if successful, insulate open theism from possible rejection. Yet, what is needed is clear-headed assessment of the

gravity of the theological issues before us, and then consideration should—and must—be given as to whether open theism ought to be accepted or rejected as a viable evangelical view. But, if open theism is not *in principle* rightly the subject of this assessment, we should realize, with great sobriety, that without *possible rejection of some views, unavoidable acceptance of any view* follows, and this will contribute to our undoing. Before us is a question of enormous theological and practical importance, clearly one of the most critical for our generation and those to follow. So, for the sake of the church, for the sake of our children, for the sake of the glory of God, let us resist all efforts that would distract us from engaging the issues and formulating the conclusions that, before God, we must decide. And in this crucial endeavor, may we, by God's grace and strength, seek to be faithful in upholding *the true* greatness and glory of God and the integrity and wisdom of his perfect word.

II. SPECIFIC POINTS OF ENGAGEMENT

First, regarding Boyd's preference for "exhaustive definite foreknowledge" for the historic position of the church that he and other open theists deny, I wish only to mention two items. To begin with, this is a case where carefully chosen semantical expression is put forth that can actually conceal rather than clarify what is disputed. For Boyd to say that he affirms "exhaustive divine foreknowledge," when that term's meaning in both Jewish and Christian traditions has included God's comprehensive knowledge of all future reality, including future free actions, can be misleading. When terms are redefined substantively yet retained, confusion, not clarity, results. Furthermore, if, as Boyd insists, the debate is over the *content* (not the scope) of the *reality* God perfectly knows, surely this entails that the *content* of God's *knowledge* is here drastically less than affirmed in the church's historic view. On a second matter, readers can see for themselves Hasker's statement quoted in the introduction of my paper where he says that in his view, "it is not possible for God to have complete and exhaustive knowledge of the future." Is this not, in other words, a denial of "exhaustive divine foreknowledge"? Apparently open theists do not speak with uniform semantic expression.

Second, I do not dispute the kind of infinite intelligence Boyd affirms, despite his claim that I must. But historic models of God have seen God's consideration of this vast realm of possibilities as taking place *in eternity past*, in relation to the formation of his decision of just what world to create. In the open view, God's infinite intelligence must be used *ad hoc*, as it were, *in history*, as events unfold. And, just how well this intelligence works for God to chart the course of the future is hard to say. At least this much is true: in light of even the twentieth century's horrific display of atrocities alone, it is difficult to take seriously the claim that by God's infinite intelligence (which includes God's "virtually certain" knowledge of all that *might* occur), God is thereby able to "intervene and alter what would otherwise come to pass."

Third, both Boyd and Sanders dispute the claim that a God lacking exhaustive (definite) foreknowledge holds false beliefs about the future and might judge his own past actions as less than wise. Five items:

(1) How does a God of infinite intelligence (i.e. in which “there is virtually no distinction between knowing a certainty and knowing a possibility”) find himself in a position in which he believes as *probabilities* future choices, actions, or events which turn out not to occur? All the celebration Boyd gives to this notion of infinite intelligence seems a bit overdrawn in light of the fact that even God, with “virtually certain” knowledge of possibilities, can get it wrong.

(2) Or can he? Sanders insists (and Boyd echoes this) that we can only say God gets it wrong if he states as a *certainty* what turns out to be false. But if it is a certainty, is this not part of God’s knowledge *per se*? And of course, no parties in this debate propose that God’s *knowledge* can be wrong. But my claim is that in the open view, God can (and does) hold *beliefs* about what could *possibly*, even *probably*, happen that turn out to be wrong. What shall we call these if not “mistaken” or “false” beliefs?

(3) Sanders claims (in point 3 of his reply) that in my paper I have quoted him out of context (n. 9 of my paper, quoting Sanders, *God Who Risks* 205). He is correct in noting that he is evaluating simple foreknowledge in this section of his book, but if this statement (that I quote) is not Sanders’s own view, I do not understand its purpose. I am willing to be corrected, but it appears that he appeals here to the reality of divine mistakes (as he apparently sees them to be) in order to show the inadequacy (in his judgment) of the simple foreknowledge view. Furthermore, when Sanders seeks to correct my interpretation of his position, he quotes *part* of what he has written (*God Who Risks* 132). But picking up where he leaves off quoting, Sanders continues, “Using the term more loosely, we might say that God would be mistaken if he believed *X* would happen (for example, Israel in Jeremiah’s day [Jer 3:7, 19–20] would come to love him) and, in fact, *X* does not come about. In this sense the Bible does attribute some mistakes to God” (*God Who Risks* 132). So, contrary to what Sanders claims, I am not offended, as he puts it, “that we [open theists] actually believe what the Bible says in such passages!” What disturbs me greatly (because surely it offends *God* greatly!) is the openness *interpretation* of these texts that attribute to God *actual* (in some real sense) *mistaken beliefs*.

(4) The fact that God is merely mistaken in his beliefs of “mere” *probabilities* (so Boyd) does not offer much consolation. So now we have a God of infinite intelligence, who possesses “virtually certain” knowledge of the unknown future, and who judges certain future actions or events not merely possible but even *probable*, yet, sadly, he turns out to be wrong.

(5) Will it do to say that God possesses infinite and perfect wisdom when, despite making the wisest decision possible under the circumstances, God himself looks back and wonders if what he did was in fact best? It is hard for me to think that because a decision might be “wise” prospectively while not actually best retrospectively, that it is *perfectly wise*. No other

model of God in the historic tradition has this problem exactly as it occurs for open theism.

Fourth, in Isaiah 40–48, is Yahweh’s claim to unique deity based solely on what he *will do in the future* (that idols cannot do) and not also on what he *foreknows of the future* (that idols cannot know)? I think a fair reading of these chapters shows that God asserts both. He “declares” what will take place, and he “accomplishes” his purposes, and *both* are put forth for embracing that he alone is God. And bear in mind, that which he declares (and hence foreknows) will happen in the future includes *innumerable future actualities involving free creaturely decisions and actions yet to take place*. It simply will not work to say that God can just accomplish these predictions on his own, for to do so would be to cancel the free-will agency of a vast number of creaturely actions. So, God’s assertion that he alone is God is predicated on his knowing and declaring what *both he and other free agents will do* in the future. God’s challenge in Isa 41:23 stands: “Declare the things that are going to come afterward, that we may know that you are gods.” How, then, can we accept the openness claim to be putting forth the true God of the Bible, when this proposed “God” fails God’s own test for deity?

Fifth, the implications of which Boyd is most incredulous are those relating to the atonement. Yet, I read with some surprise myself his basic reaffirmation of the very criticisms I raise. Clearly Boyd cannot avoid the truth that, in the open view, when Jesus dies on the cross, it is strictly impossible that he (or the Father) even knows *who* and *how many* will exist in the future and, even less, *what sins* these unknown persons might commit. So, when Boyd says that Christ dies for *possible sins* (and substitutes for *possible people*, I take it), my concern remains: it cannot be the case, then, that Christ died for *you and me*, and that he paid *our penalty* for *our sins*. Scripture has always been understood very personally here: Christ died *for you* and he paid for *your sins* (as in 1 Pet 2:24, “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross”). This is lost in open theism, and more importantly, the open view here is not what the Bible teaches. And for the record, although both Boyd and Sanders (quite authoritatively) assert, in so many words, that I hold to limited atonement, I do not. I believe that when Christ hung on the cross, the Father imputed to him and he bore the sin of *every person* (personally) who has ever lived and will live, and *each and every sin* (precisely) that each person commits, past, present, and future.

Sixth, on the question of open theism and inerrancy, notice how cautious and reticent both Sanders and Boyd are of affirming in Scripture “inviolable divine predictions that involve, for their fulfillment, future choices and actions of free creatures,” and then ask yourself these two questions: First, what kind of a Bible are we left with if we deny such predictions? Did you notice, by the way, that none of the respondents commented on my appeal to Daniel 11 as overwhelming evidence (in one text!) of an incalculably great number of specific, detailed predictions whose fulfillment requires a multitude of future free actions of moral agents? Second, can open theism

account for such “inviolable divine predictions” by asserting that God can simply intervene and bring about whatever he chooses? The answer, of course, is that, yes, God can intervene and bring about whatever he wants to, but, no, he cannot do this while leaving moral agents free (in the libertarian sense) in the roles they play in that fulfillment. Open theism cannot have it both ways: they cannot account for the *surety* of the fulfillment of God’s predictions by saying, “God can just do it,” and hold that the people who choose and act in the fulfillment are *free*. So, while both Arminianism and Calvinism can account for such inviolable divine predictions (because God knows the end from the beginning), open theism is left with this problem of not being able to assert in principle, and in unqualified ways, that God’s predictions, whose fulfillment involves free agents’ choices and actions, can be and are inerrant.

Seventh, without question, the part of these responses that most surprised me is Boyd’s declaration for the “record” that “I, for one, hold that Jesus possessed compatibilistic freedom.” I have not previously seen Boyd use quite this language (perhaps he has, but I am not aware of it), although something like these concepts has been present in Boyd’s writings. I am quite sure that this declaration will give rise to some discussion among open theists and within many circles. Some questions that immediately flood my mind are: Does this offer some form of vindication for the rationality and legitimacy of the compatibilist freedom that has been so clearly rejected by freewill theists? If Christ lived the whole of his life exercising compatibilist freedom, were his actions (his obedience, resisting temptation, willingness to go to the cross) genuinely morally significant, or were they constrained and hence robotic? If our eschatological perfection involves our possession of compatibilist freedom, will we have true and genuine moral experiences and expressions in heaven? If this is the explanation for how the cross could have been determined from the foundation of the world, does this not (as indicated in my paper) still leave the problem of the implicit determination of the entrance of sin into the world? Well, more could be listed, but at least it seems clear to me that the difficulties I suggest in points 2 and 6 of “The Gospel of Salvation” section remain, and it is not at all apparent that open theism can account for biblical teaching on the eternal plan and purpose of God to save sinners through Christ’s death on the cross (1 Pet 1:20) and our election to be saved, before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4).

Eighth, Boyd and Sanders complain several times that I have not acknowledged where open theists have spoken to some of the objections I raise; I did here engage their responses to these objections sufficiently. On this charge, I fully agree that there is much more openness literature than I cited or interacted with in this paper, and I wish I could have engaged them more. I have, however, written a full book (my *God’s Lesser Glory*) engaging open theism on the very items Boyd and Sanders here say I should acknowledge. Also in this book are many of the kinds of proposals Boyd challenges me to address. Perhaps he is unaware that I have dealt in some measure with the very items he suggests I need to answer.

III. CONCLUSION

Two primary questions face us in this debate with open theism. First, what does the openness position hold and what is the full extent of its implications (biblically, theologically, and practically) for the faith and life of the church? Second, does the openness denial of exhaustive divine (definite) foreknowledge constitute a theological departure serious enough to warrant evangelicals excluding open theism from those views that are acceptable within our society, institutions, and churches? Surely more can be and needs to be said, but I trust that enough has been argued here to demonstrate the legitimacy and crucial importance of dealing with both questions. If we deal only with the first question and refuse, in principle, to address the second, we risk adopting a tolerance stance that will leave evangelicalism vulnerable to horrific doctrinal deviations.

The opposite fear, urged on us by others, is also important to consider: if we deal harshly with open theists, a chill will settle on our gatherings and we will stifle creativity and discussion. So, what is needed is a course that insists on fairness and eschews wrongful treatment, on the one hand, but one that also accepts the legitimacy and importance of careful scrutiny, evaluation, and boundary assessment on the other. The former is a must in the name of Christian charity, but the latter is likewise essential for the sake of doctrinal fidelity. Please, let us not play one off against the other. In the name of the Christ who was full of both grace and truth, may God grant us his enablement to hold the faith once for all delivered to the saints, and to do so in faith, hope, and love, before God and others.