

The Epistle of James

Lesson # 11 Good Conduct and Disorder

James 3:13-18

Date: May 10, 2015

I. Who is Wise?

James 3:13

Read Job 28:12-28

If the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom [Prov. 1:7; 9:10; Ps. 111:10; Job 28:28], then it is a sure thing that those who do not fear the Lord have no wisdom.. Oh, they may be pretty smart people, knowing how to sell or manipulate people, or have a depth of knowledge within a field of science, business or a profession that sets them apart from all others, but they are fools. See Romans 1:18-23; I Cor. 1:18-25; 2:14, etc.

Verse 13 here is true to the flow of thought within this epistle. It is practical and makes sense. So one who has wisdom and understanding – ie – has knowledge and knows how to apply it will exhibit ‘good conduct’, and his or her works will be done in the meekness of wisdom. “Real wisdom is always more than knowledge; it is living according to that knowledge in the most appropriate way.”ⁱ Contrast this with Jeremiah 4:22 – *“My people are foolish; they know Me not; they are stupid children; they have no understanding. They are wise – in doing evil! But how to do good they know not.”* Worldly wisdom compels one to practice evil and the wiser one is in the ways of the world, the more they don’t need God. They feel righteous because they’ve got the world ‘all figured out.’

But godly wisdom (v. 17) is *“first pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.”* Daniel Doriani comments here,

“A Christian is obligated to keep God’s law, but Christian living is more than law-keeping. It is especially deleterious to narrow the grandeur of the law to a set of rules. Many Christians think this way: “As a Christian I do certain things that pagans do not. I read the Bible, pray, worship, and witness to Christ. I also avoid certain things that pagans do. I don’t get drunk, curse, smoke, take drugs, or watch certain movies.”

Some Christians think, “If I do the things in group A and shun the things in group B, God will be pleased. I simply need to know the rules and follow them.” God is pleased when we obey His law, but if a disciple thinks of nothing but the law, he can descend into a kind of legalism.

The Christian life includes “good deeds” and obedience to the law. But it is more. We also bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). We are “transformed by the renewing of the mind (Rom. 12:2). We have a “spring of water welling up to eternal life” (JN 4:14). The images of fruit and wells of water teach that the Christian life involves more than rule-keeping. There is a certain spontaneity to it. When we live by the quiet work of the Spirit, the beautiful lifestyle becomes commonplace, almost invisible to us, as automatic as the turns we make as we drive to work daily.”ⁱⁱ

One who has godly wisdom (“wisdom from above”) exhibits that character trait daily. If this section is a continuation of the argument regarding the desire to be a teacher in 3:1 (and many believe it is), then it is even more important to be wise and able, by good conduct to display this wisdom by your actions. People will follow teachers, as

history shows us – they will even follow bad teachers. In fact, “The disaster caused by church leaders using their words unwisely is often enormous, as dreadful as a forest fire or deadly poison.”ⁱⁱⁱ Godly wisdom is revealed by how the works are done in one’s life, not just that they are done. We have all seen people who we believed to be legitimately saved slip into displays of actions that do not reflect wisdom from above; we’ve delivered sharp rebukes, perhaps necessary, but not done in love. We realize that this can be true of us as well. So what James is trying to show us is that there are 2 kinds of wisdom we can attain to, and both will expose the facts of the type of wisdom we have as we live out our lives, especially when we happen to be a church leader.

“Meekness of wisdom” does not mean that you have to fold at the first sign of push-back when you are teaching or in a relationship. Meekness is not weakness, but is rather strength operating from a position of confidence that the strength does not have to be used, even though it could win you the argument. Sometimes, winning the argument is not the wisest course of action. Have you ever heard the phrase, “I won the battle but lost the war.”? It is to be so focused on being found “right” that we don’t see the harm we’ve done to another person, for example. They may see you as right, but lose respect for your tactics, and so you will have fractured the relationship; friend to friend, teacher to student, sibling to sibling, etc.

Paul gives wise advice in II Tim. 2:22-25: “*So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.*”²³ *Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.*²⁴ *And the Lord's servant^[a] must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,*²⁵ *correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,”* Daniel Doriani says this:

“In the kingdom, strength and gentleness go together. Suppose a teacher has prepared a lesson for hours. Near the end, someone stands up with an opinion that just popped into his head. The theme is, “Teacher, you’re all wrong.” One must be strong to remain gentle in the face of an ill-informed last minute disruption. Gentle reasoning wins the objector and retains the confidence and focus of the class. A man must be strong to be gentle.

The issue is not the strength of a personality but its direction. The Bible says gentle people live a certain way; they are patient. They make peace. They are slow to take offense. They are long-suffering. They do not demand their way. Peace follows them wherever they go (James 3:18).”^{iv}

The wisdom of God is not something we can acquire by our efforts. Certainly, we can contribute to having it as we study God’s word and “do it” rather than just “read it”, but true wisdom comes to us from God – cf. 1:5. If we lack wisdom, who is its source? The more of Christ we possess, as mature believers, the more like Him we’ll become. In Romans 12:1-2, Paul caps off 11 chapters of doctrine by sharing what the proper – the wise – response is to knowing these things, to knowing the amazing Christ! The world’s wisdom is philosophy, but when philosophy attempts to mine the depths of God’s word, it taints it, twists it, attempting to make its clarity cling to the philosophy being applied to it. Two good examples of philosophical “theologies” are Open Theism and Molinism. [Both are explained briefly as an addenda to this lesson] These two ‘theologies’ try to apply human wisdom in an attempt to defend God’s fairness and goodness, or to explain why everyone is not eventually saved. Universalism and

Inclusivism regarding Hell are also being heavily touted as answers (human wisdom) to the hated Biblical doctrine of Hell.

There is a lot to choose from out there in the world of “Christian” books, which is why James White often says that a Christian bookstore is one of the most dangerous places in the world. I wanted to provide you with a quote that sort of symbolized the modern movement towards erasing hell from the Christian consciousness, and settled on a couple of brief quotes from Rob Bell’s book, “Love Wins”, published amidst a lot of push-back from reformed theologians in 2011.

Bell focuses on the Hebrew word for “forever” [*olam*], and citing some verses where it used in a context of a long but finite time, and comes up with this gem of ‘wisdom’;

“So when we read “eternal punishment”, it’s important that we don’t read categories and concepts into a phrase that aren’t there. Jesus isn’t talking about forever as we think of forever. Jesus may be talking about something else, which has all sorts of implications for our understandings of what happens after we die...”^v [Contra [MT 25:46](#)]

Later on in his book, he attacks JN14:6, with this crazy idea;

“This is as wide and expansive a claim as a person can make. What he doesn’t say is how, or when, or in what manner the mechanism functions that gets people to God through Him. He doesn’t even state that those coming to the Father will even know that they are coming exclusively through Him. He simply claims that whatever God is doing in the world to know and redeem and love and restore the world is happening through Him.”^{vi}

Soon after this, he argues against the exclusivity of Christ by offering up “inclusivity”;

“Then there is inclusivity. The kind that is open to all religions, the kind that trusts that good people will get in, that there is only one mountain, but it has many paths. This inclusivity assumes that as long as your heart is fine or your actions measure up, you’ll be okay.

And then there is an exclusivity on the other side of inclusivity. This kind insists that Jesus is the way, but holds tightly to the assumption that the all-embracing, saving love of this particular Jesus Christ will of course include all sorts of unexpected people from across the cultural spectrum.

As soon as the door is opened to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Baptists from Cleveland, many Christians become very uneasy, saying that then Jesus doesn’t matter anymore, the cross is irrelevant, it doesn’t matter what you believe, and so forth.

Not true. Absolutely, unequivocally, unalterably, not true. What Jesus does is declare that he, and he alone, is saving everybody. And then he leaves the door way, way open.

Creating all sorts of possibilities. He is as narrow as himself and as wide as the universe.”^{vii}

Our godly wisdom must be part of an interaction with the world – both believers and non-believers alike (though perhaps in different ways) must interact within the world / our lives. Spiros Zodhiates wisely comments;

“Many people, unfortunately, have misunderstood the Christian as being one whose contact is only with God. It is not so. God has created us in a community of people, and after He saves us through Jesus

Christ, He continues to keep us among people to learn and to teach and to practice both that which we receive from God and that which we receive from man. There is a contact that is perpendicular and a contact that is horizontal. What use is the perpendicular if it is not spread horizontally?"^{viii}

II. Disorder and Vile Practice

James 3:14-16

Immediately, because the first word of v. 14 is "But", we see that James is supplying us with a contrast, revealing two types of wisdom (as already mentioned). Zhodiatas again says,

" One of the hardest things for the Christian to do is to be truthful and honest in his showmanship, to let his tongue represent that which is in his heart. Thus the argument of James runs: Now you have stated to the world that you are wise, that you possess wisdom, namely, Jesus Christ and His Spirit. Then show it by your good conduct...There is one thing which James presupposes of the Christian who states he is wise, and that is he behaves himself. He has a mode of life which is entirely different from others."^{ix}

This contrasts with what James now says in vv. 14-16. It is possible to possess the wrong sort of wisdom - a way that is not demonstrated in conduct that is meek or wise according to God's standard. Although the section of the letter that began in 3:1 carries additional weight with regard to teachers, it is not as if we can then conclude that this says nothing about Christians who are not official "ministers". This teaching and wisdom is for everyone in the church.

"Bitter jealousy and selfish ambitions in one's heart reveal that one is living a lie. They claim to be wise, but by their actions (not meek, not wise) they show that they have no essential humility. "If then, humility marks the wise person, these negative qualities exclude a person from being considered wise."^x The jealousy that James mentions in v. 14, because it is modified by the adjective, "bitter", has nothing to do with romantic feelings but rather with sinful envy. This is the sort of envy that people have when their ideas (or theology) are challenged by those who gain a hearing for an opposing viewpoint – cf. Acts 5:17; 13:34; MK 15:6-11 – of Pilate.

Since this is paired with "selfish ambition", it is a rebuke against those who displayed envious partisanship against those who were speaking the truth, and by doing so, proved they were not humble, but rather boasters and complainers. By their ungodly actions, they were being "false to the truth". Envy and selfish ambition (strife) will lead to many evils – boasting, quarrelling, criticism of our rivals, gossip, etc. Envy can compel us to be secretly happy when others fall into sorrowful circumstances – it stifles love. "Ambition and envy breed restlessness. But godly wisdom brings peace and righteousness."^{xi}

In v. 15, the source of this type of 'wisdom' is not God, but rather the opposite of God. It's worldly, unspiritual (in the correct form of spiritual), sinful and demonic. IOW, the world, the flesh and the Devil – our souls' mortal enemies. See Eph. 6:10-13; I JN 2:15-17; 3:8. If you are taking your cues from these sources as to how to conduct yourself as a 'believer', you have not understood the gospel and God's loathing of sin.

Verse 16 explains the outcome of false or worldly wisdom. If you have ever been in a church business meeting when the unity of the church is fractured or strained by those who only have worldly wisdom, you have seen firsthand the truth of this verse. Disorder destroys unity – contra Eph. 4:1-3 – which tells us that we are to strive for unity by practising *“humility, gentleness with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*

When ungodly wisdom is thrown in, the church body is put at risk and those who think themselves ‘wise’ exhibit selfish disregard for others and desire only that things be done their way! We must fight against any desire to follow worldly wisdom in our church fellowship (by understanding the gracious incredible value of that fellowship), and those temptations to use worldly wisdom will press on us from time to time. We may want to staunchly defend our intelligence by refusing to see someone else’s point and arguing against it, often when no critical doctrine is in play – ie.) eschatology; and we also have to recognise that sometimes a critical truth is at stake and we must defend that, but it has to be done in love, not with back-handed Bible thumping. There really is no place in the church for pride, envy or selfish ambition. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his widely acclaimed short book, “Life Together”, makes this brief but important statement:

“The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer.”^{xii}

With regard to pride and arrogance, isn’t this the very problem Paul dealt with in Corinth? Note I Cor. 3:1-4; 3:18; 4:7-13; 4:19-21. In chapter 6, the people were taking other members to court, in chapter 5, sexual immorality was being applauded; they sinned against each other, even acting pompous and arrogant at the Lord’s Supper! In each of the seven letters to the churches in Revelation 2 – 3, there was a potential church-killing flaw in virtually every church if it was allowed to fester unchecked. These churches were in disorder – in some cases forgetting Christ, letting their love for Him slip away, following Satanic impulses and so on. In each case, Christ showed them what needed to change, and promised them certain things to encourage them to overcome, to press on, even though, for some of these churches, severe persecution was just over the horizon.

III. Wisdom from Above

James 3:17

Whereas wisdom that is earthly, unspiritual or demonic cause the disorder that v. 16 describes, James now contrasts true godly wisdom, which is from above. James identifies 8 things that characterize this wisdom. Wisdom will produce these things.

Pure

Christ said, In MT 5:8 – *“Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God”*, and James has already stated in 1:27 that pure and undefiled religion compels people to visit orphans and widows and to keep oneself unstained by the world. Wisdom produces purity which makes it attractive for the believer to shun the world’s pull, and to cling to Christ. Heb. 11:24-26 equates this idea of separating from sin and the

riches of the world while enjoying even the reproach of Christ. Here, Moses would rather follow God – the hard path – than strive to enjoy fleeting sinful pleasures in the world. Moral purity and devotional purity in worship are what we need to strive for.

Peace loving / Gentle / Open to Reason

These 3 things go together and are the hallmark of one who worships God, and has His wisdom given to them.

Notice how much of Galatians 5:22-24 picks up on these things as it lists the fruit of the Spirit Christian will possess as evidence of their devotion to Christ? Peace loving does not have to mean capitulation, to being a doormat for every idea or whim of these people we have relationships with. There may be times when we must challenge things in the church and in life that threaten the honour and glory of Jesus Christ. Romans 14:19 says, “*So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.*”, and 12:18; “*If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*” This makes it clear that we only have control over our end of any relationship or conflict.

Kent Hughes shares this prayer, attributed to Francis of Assisi:

“Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;
Where there is hate, may I bring love;
Where offense, may I bring pardon;
May I bring unison in place of discord.”^{xiii}

A gentle person (related to meekness) is considerate of others, and even when wronged, will forgo his or her own rights in order to keep the peace. Cf. I Cor. 6:5-7 – A man or woman who possesses this aspect of godly wisdom will make allowances for others, and will realise that they too have, within their own character, things that could offend others, so in a forgiving spirit, they take the kindest or gentlest perspective they can. Note Romans 15: 1-7; I Pet. 4:8 and James 5:20.

Those who are submissive / open to reason have a teachable spirit. When someone points out to them an error or flaw, this characteristic of godly wisdom helps them to consider whether that person’s assessment of them is correct. If they see the person’s point is right, they will change rather than arguing back in order to protect their own self-esteem.

Full of Mercy & Full of Good Fruits

Mercy in biblical theology is not compassion that results in pity and sympathy. “It is compassion in action.”^{xiv} Again, James seems to be alluding to the Sermon on the Mount – cf. Matt. 5:7 “*Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy.*” If we see mercy as relating to love, and I believe there is some warrant for that viewpoint (cf. Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan in LK 10:25-37 – see especially v. 37, 27; love = mercy). And so, when Paul says in I Cor. 13:1-3, we recognise that we can do all the right things, but without the motivation of love, our good actions are meaningless.

We have already touched on the fruit of the Spirit, and what James means here is that our actions – all of them taken together – will ultimately display who we are in Christ. Hypocrisy will always eventually be exposed, but occasional lapses in our actions do not make us hypocrites, they make us human. It is direction, not perfection that God expects from us.

Impartial and Sincere

Here are the 7th and 8th things that wisdom from above will produce in us. Being impartial involves (to an extent) being consistent with what we believe and how we apply that to our lives. Our theology needs to drive our worldview. The word impartial here is better translated “unwavering” (NASB) or “undoubting” (RSV). Unwavering definitely pairs better with what James says a few verses late in 4:7-8 (“purify your hearts you double-minded”), and also with the next characteristic of wisdom in 3:17, “sincere”; which means “with no hypocrisy”.

James’ virtues form clusters. The opening trio – peace-loving, considerate and submissive” all point to a unified church, mercy and good fruits point to our personal relationships, and the final pair both indicate a whole hearted faith, one without wavering or hypocrisy^{xv}. Purity, the first one, over arches all of them.

How Do We Acquire This Wisdom From Above?

R. Kent Hughes helpfully gives us 4 ways that this wisdom comes to us.^{xvi}

1. Reverence – the fear of God. “There can be no wisdom apart from a quaking, fearful vision of God and our own contrasting littleness. This vision is the missing element today in evangelical Christianity. Christians, in their desire to be relevant and relational in their worship, have minimized the awesomeness of God and have falsely maximized their own virtues and importance.”
2. Conversion – cf. I Cor. 1:30 – When we are “in Christ”, we become rooted in wisdom.
3. Scripture – cf. Ps. 119:97-100; Col. 3:16 – How can we acquire wisdom from God apart from His message and our saturating our lives in that message?
4. Prayer – cf. James 1:5 – once we recognise that we owe God our worship, and yet we are also aware of our sinfulness and separation from Him, we must realise that our only hope is to call out to Him for the wisdom we so sorely need.

IV. Making Peace

James 3:18

See Matthew 5:9 – “*Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God.*” Righteousness flourishes when God’s people seek peace. This is the effect these traits of wisdom have on us as individuals and within the church family as we practice these points of wisdom given to us from above. James is about to change gears to talk about quarrels and fights in chapter 4, and his rebuke of people involved in this sin is severe – cf. James 4:4. We must seek God’s wisdom because worldly wisdom generates jealousy and selfish ambition.

Paul talks about how to avoid being quarrelsome when we confront error – note II Tim. 2:24-25, and James 5:19-20 indicates that a fair minded believer, open to reason, can be brought back should they slip into sin and wander from the truth. Some believe this verse may be a proverb of James's day.^{xvii} James's main point in saying this is that you cannot produce righteousness amidst bitterness, jealousy, selfishness and by scratching away to climb the social ladder desperately trying to better your position above other people. Righteousness is not developed in that way – it can only arise amidst peaceful love for God and for others. James 1:19,21 highlighted very similar advice for the believer, and Paul's words in II Cor. 1:12 should have the last word here: *“For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience, that we behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God, and supremely so toward you.”*

Addenda to lesson 11

Philosophical Religious Positions

Whereas most orthodox religions have arisen out of the Bible's description of what worship and church-life are supposed to be, even guiding people to determine doctrines, both major and minor. They also establish patterns for church government (polity) and traditions to follow. There are, however, philosophical deviations from orthodoxy which are established by some to defend against some doctrine that people feel are better explained in a way outside of the established norms by “the church”. Throughout history, there have been numerous versions of these deviations or deflections from orthodox positions of theology, and in some cases, new denominations have been formed to give people with those beliefs a place to gather as fellow ‘worshippers’ who are all sympathetic to those views. A couple of examples of this are Unitarians (who deny the Trinity), and Universalists (who claim that everyone will go to heaven). Even in our own modern times there is a plethora of deviant religious philosophies that threaten to weaken the church by drawing people into anti-Christian ‘worship’. To name just a few movements and people: Secular Humanism, The New Atheism (Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins), Seeker Friendly, The Emergent Church, Scientology, Jim Jones, Heaven's Gate, Branch Davidians (David Koresh), Westboro Baptist Church (Fred Phelps), Family radio (Harold Camping), Landmark Baptists, etc. Never mind all the other cults and false religions out there for decades that masquerade as “Christian” – Roman Catholicism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, Unity, etc.

When these deviations occur, it is a result of man's wisdom rather than God's wisdom. Although there are many modern permutations of philosophical religion – I wanted to focus on two specifically which are prevalent and insidious, because they easily take ‘Christians’ in with subtle variances in thought that seem plausible and biblical to the untrained ear. The two are: Open Theism (a variation of Process Theology), and Molinism (or Middle Knowledge). There are well-known names associated with both these positions, and both are an outcropping of Arminian Theology, although Open Theism, in my estimation, is really the logical outcome of Arminian thought. Arminians will argue against Open Theism, but really, it is an explanation of how

their own theology should be construed. Molinism likes to seem to be almost Calvinistic, but its chief proponents criticize Calvinism mercilessly. Since the majority of the North American Protestant church (and the Roman Catholic) is Arminian in their theological position, some may hold Open Theist or Molinistic views but have never heard these things articulated.

Obviously, there are many other sub-Christian and anti-Christian religions out there today, but some are really cults, following a charismatic leader with some vision, or hypnotic hold over his followers. Other religious systems, such as the RC church have grown as a result of cult-like control over their people using doctrines such as Purgatory, guilt, contrived rituals or liturgies to help people feel good about themselves and thus to hold people on board.

Open Theism

Let's look first at Open Theism. The names of those who have turned this into a system of so-called Christianity include: Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, Greg Boyd (who also claims to be a Neo-Molinist), David and Randall Basinger, William Hasker, Richard Rice, Frederick Sontag, Richard Swinburne, and many others. They have, among them, written numerous books that are sold indiscriminately in Christian Bookstores to unwary seekers as seemingly orthodox theology.

Open Theism is a theological system of thought developed from a perceived need to accomplish 4 main things:

- a.) To rescue God's character from any hint that He is responsible for or has control over evil, even evil that has yet to occur.
- b.) To protect human autonomy so that the choices human beings make are truly free choices and are not coerced in any way as robotic choices decreed by God before they occur.
- c.) To make humans responsible – as a result of their libertarian freedom – for evil, suffering and all sorts of issues that do not live up to the perfect “very good” world God created.
- d.) To make sense of prayer. For example, if God already knows, why should I pray?

In order to accomplish and develop this theological system, a number of established biblical concepts and doctrines must be discarded wholesale or altered significantly. What the name of this movement relates to is the future, and God's ability to see it. It is called “Open” because it has not yet happened, and thus God cannot possibly know what will occur until His free creatures make their decisions. Only then can He act to control outcomes. He is thus a great responder, but not a good predictor.

Greg Boyd being cited by John Piper says;

“In the Christian view, God knows all of reality – everything there is to know. But to assume He knows ahead of time how every person is going to freely act assumes that each person's free activity is already there to know – even before he freely does it! But it's not. If we have been given freedom, we

create the reality of our decisions by making them. And until we make them, they don't exist. Thus, in my view at least, there simply isn't anything to know until we make it there to know. So God can't foreknow the good or bad decisions of the people He creates until He creates these people and they, in turn, create their decisions."^{xviii}

John Sanders, taking an even stricter position, comments;

"Sanders writes that God had 'no reason to suspect' that Adam and Eve would sin. He also claims that God and Jesus only realized in the garden of Gethsemane that Jesus would have to be crucified. 'The path to the cross,' he states, 'comes about only through God's interaction with humans in history. Until [Gethsemane] 'Father and Son...both come to understand that there is no other way.' At that point in Jesus' life, Sanders states, 'the canyon narrows even for God.' So Father and Son resolve to make the best of it as Jesus proceeds to his death even though, Sanders tells us, they do not know whether this 'gambit' will work – whether, in other words, Jesus' death will lead to anyone's salvation."^{xix}

You may ask, "well how does God know in advance the evil decisions people make and how is he able to predict the future so accurately? Can Genesis 50:20 be the truth? *"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."* Greg Boyd says,

"We must remember", Boyd notes in a passage that is critically important for understanding his exposition of the open view, that moral responsibility applies to the acquired character of self-determining agents even more fundamentally than it applies to the particular decisions agents make which reflect and reinforce their character. Traditionally theologians have distinguished the character a person receives from God from the character they freely acquire. There is no contradiction in the claim that a person is morally responsible for an act even though they could not have done otherwise, so long as the character that now rendered their action certain flowed from a character they themselves acquired. It was not "infused" into them by God...hence, if God decides that it fits his providential plan to use a person whose choices have solidified his character as wicked, God is not responsible for this person's wickedness."^{xx}

So, for example, how could Jesus predict with such stunning accuracy that Peter would deny Christ 3 times on the night before Calvary? Because Jesus knew Peter's character so well that He knew what he would do when confronted. But why not twice or 4 times? Maybe Peter wouldn't be confronted at all.

What do views like this, which by the way, do not successfully protect God's character (as if he needed our protection) mean to associated doctrines, like the atonement of Christ? Bruce Ware – who is definitely not an Open Theist, comments;

"Since no future sin yet existed, on openness grounds, God could not know any of that future sin for which Christ's atonement was meant to pay. The effect of this and the previous point is to see the crucifixion, as it relates to people conceived after Christ's death, as an impersonal and abstract sort of substitution and payment. He cannot really have died personally in their place nor for their very own sin. In fact, Christ would have had reason to wonder, as he hung on the cross, whether for any, or for how many, and for what sins, he was now giving his life. The sin paid for could only be sin in principle, and not sin by imputation, and the people died for was a blurry, impersonal, faceless, nameless, and numberless potential grouping."^{xxi} Maybe no one would respond to the gospel.

What does it do to our worship of God and to His sovereignty?

“A young woman in our church heard that [Greg Boyd’s contention that God doesn’t know in advance the horrors that will happen to us], and wrote to me astonished at such counsel. Her situation was worse. I will not share the details, but only that she said that she too, and her children, were forsaken. She said, “If God does not know everything the future holds, how is he any different from any other friend on whose shoulder I might cry? He may be good, and loving and righteous., but if he is not in control of what happens to me tomorrow, how can I have any confidence that he can work all things together for good?”^{xxii}

The confidence that God knows what he is doing has gotten me through the last five years. I believe that God knew from the beginning what ____ would do – that he cannot be surprised by anything. And because I believe that, I can believe that God intends this whole thing for my good. It’s not just that everything will turn out all right in the end; it’s that right now he is working his purpose out in my life, to move me to the next degree of glory. If that working includes suffering, how much better it is to know that it is purposed by a loving, all-powerful God, who “gives unto each day what he deems best”.

Why would we ever want to worship a God who does not know the future and control it? What exactly would we expect Him to accomplish? Such is the world’s wisdom when applied to theology. The flaws of Open Theism are huge, and taken to a logical conclusion, based on their own reasoning, here is an example of a huge problem. Thinking about Adolf Hitler, and his hatred of the Jews, and specifically the Holocaust – an Open Theist would argue that God had no way to know what Hitler would do once he got to power so He could not snuff him out before that and save all those people. OK – not really biblical, but OK. So once God did know how it would go, at, say, as the first trainload of people going to Auschwitz arrive and are exterminated, and another train is being loaded...the reason God did not act is still, “He didn’t know the future”? But He did know the present didn’t He? Yet, He didn’t act. The biblical answer here is God allowed it or decreed it because He had a purpose for it to take place, not because He didn’t know. If He didn’t know what was going on day after day after day in those concentration camps, it’s not that he was ignorant (which by the way does nothing to get Him off the hook).

Open Theists place a lot of stock in verses where God is said to repent or relent. One of the more often used is I Samuel 15:11. This verse (and others like it) is supposed to prove that God learns and then changes His mind. The word here translated in the ESV as “regret” is translated “grieved” in the NIV, and the same word is used again in v. 35. The Open Theist argument is that this regret implies that God didn’t know what would happen.

Historically, in orthodox Christianity, this passage has been seen to teach that God accommodated His language to us, with the impact of v. 11 being to make us realise that God grieves over sin. It has never been interpreted to mean that God is saying, “If I had only known back then...”^{xxiii} Right within the passage, there is proof that the Open Theist version of what this means cannot be right! Look at v. 29, “*He is not a man, that he should have regret*”. This verse warns us not to conclude exactly what the Open Theist concludes. God does not regret or repent in the same way that humans do^{xxiv}. His regret, when stated, does not imply lack of foreknowledge, but rather a teaching moment for the reader to understand his hatred of sin.

Molinism or Middle Knowledge

This theological position is also absolutely man-made and philosophical – the world’s wisdom attempting to explain God’s wisdom. When compared to Open Theism, this is a more complicated idea. It was developed as a theological system in the 16th century by a Roman Catholic monk named Luis de Molina, who sought to defend Rome against the Calvinistic Reformers, as well as argue against the Dominican sect with Roman Catholicism who saw God’s view of the future much differently.

Greg Boyd, who also calls himself a Neo-Molinist, actually explains Molinism’s theological position well, although he does not agree with it fully. The most well-known defender of this position is William Lane Craig, who debates a lot of non-believers and has a special disdain for Calvinists. When asked if he could name a particularly heretical religion, out of all possible world religions, he said, “Calvinism”.

In a nutshell, Molinism is based on the idea that God has selected this world – out of all the worlds He could have created – as the one in which He could save the most people without interfering with their free wills. As a result of that, He knows what Molinists call “counterfactuals”, which are things that God knows which do not necessarily occur, but if they did, He knows how someone would have responded, because He has seen variant responses based on the worlds He reviewed before He selected this model as the one to go with. The key component to this system is man’s free will, and it is to maintain man’s free will that God rejected thousands of worlds that He could have created. William Lane Craig uses this example;

“At that logically prior moment God knows, for example, that there is a possible world in which Peter denies Christ three times, and another possible world in which Peter affirms Christ, and yet another world in which it is Matthew who denies Christ three times, and so on. God picks one of these worlds to be actual, and thus subsequent to His decree, it is true that Peter will deny Christ three times. Moreover, God knows this truth because he knows which world He decreed.”^{xxv}

“For example, there is a possible world in which Peter affirms Christ in precisely the same circumstances in which he denied Him. But given the counterfactual truth that if Peter were in precisely those circumstances he would freely deny Christ, then the possible world in which Peter freely affirms Christ in those circumstances is not feasible for God. God could make Peter affirm Christ in those circumstances, but then his confession would not be free.”^{xxvi}

If you are somewhat confused by this, join the group. This thinking is so convoluted that it can give you a headache trying to sort it all out. It is mainly a dodge to sound Calvinistic about God’s sovereignty without losing man’s autonomous free will. At one point I heard Craig argue that God “has to play the cards He’s been dealt”. What??! What a theological cost to maintain man’s freedom! We should be worshipping whoever dealt God the cards! In another lecture I heard him give, he freely admitted that he did not know the difference between Calvinism and Hyper-Calvinism, and that he believed John Calvin was a Hyper-Calvinist. Yet, in his ignorance, he classifies Calvinism as heretical. How would he know?

I've only briefly highlighted these 2 philosophical systems out of many which are out there. Man's philosophy, when it is applied to the Bible, can only bring confusion, discouragement and ultimately, damnation for those who get sucked into it.

ⁱ James Emery White, *The Church in an Age of Crisis*, Baker Books, 2012, p. 11

ⁱⁱ Daniel M. Doriani; *James: Reformed Expository Commentary*, P & R Publishing, 2007, p. 120.

ⁱⁱⁱ Christopher W. Morgan, *A Theology of James*, P & R Publishing, 2010, p. 52

^{iv} Doriani, p. 122

^v Rob Bell, *Love Wins*, Harper-One, 2011; pp 92-93

^{vi} IBID, p. 154

^{vii} IBID p. 154-155

^{viii} Spiros Zodhiates, *The Behaviour of Belief*, Eerdmans, 1959, reprint 1966, p. 136

^{ix} IBID, pp. 138-139

^x Douglas Moo, *The Letter of James*, Eerdmans, 2000, p. 171

^{xi} Doriani, p. 123

^{xii} Dietrich Bonhoeffer; *Life Together*; Augsburg Fortress, Dietrich Bonhoeffer – Works – Volume 5; 1996, reprint, p. 29

^{xiii} St. Francis of Assisi, cited by R. Kent Hughes, *James – Faith That Works*, Crossway, 1991, p. 158

^{xiv} Hughes, p. 160

^{xv} Doriani, p. 126

^{xvi} Hughes pp. 149-150

^{xvii} Hughes, p. 161

^{xviii} *Beyond the Bounds – Open Theism and the Undermining of Christianity*; John Piper, Justin Taylor, Paul Kjoss

Helseth, editors Crossway Books, 2003, p. 10

^{xix} IBID – cited by Mark Talbot, pp. 94-95

^{xx} IBID, Paul Helseth, citing Greg Boyd, P. 289

^{xxi} IBID, Bruce Ware, p. 333

^{xxii} IBID, John Piper, pp 383-384

^{xxiii} Randy Alcorn, *hand in Hand*, Multnomah, 2014; p. 109

^{xxiv} IBID, p. 110

^{xxv} William Lane Craig, *The Middle Knowledge View*; in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*; James K. Beilby, Paul R. Eddy, Editors, IVP Academic, 2001, p. 122.

^{xxvi} IBID, p. 123