

House Group Notes

13th June 2017



Ichthus Values, Characteristics & Distinctives Session 15:

Distinctives: What Makes Ichthus Unique

Part 1 of 7: Relational Theology Part 1 of 2

Introduction

As part of our House Group series on Ichthus' values, characteristics and distinctives, we are now going to spend some time looking at Ichthus' distinctives, or, what makes Ichthus unique. There are a number of things that make Ichthus unique, and these views were part of the reason Ichthus formed in the first place. It is not to say others don't hold these views, but it is not common to find them all in one place. As we go along you'll notice we will have touched on some of the subjects briefly already, but when we come to them we will take the opportunity to look at them in more detail.

The upcoming topics include (read these, but no need to expand at this point):

- **Battle Theology** – We have an enemy in Satan and there is a battle going on in the heavenlies that we can take part in through prayer.
- **Relational Theology** – As free-will people, we choose or don't choose to work with God to bring about his purposes for the future.
- **Women in Ministry** – We believe women are completely equal to men and can do anything a man can do in the church to serve God.
- **Evangelical** – We have a role to take the good news of Jesus to all people in the world.
- **Charismatic/Pentecostal** – We believe that the gifts of God's Holy Spirit are for today and that we can all be used by the Lord to practice them.
- **Christocentric Hermeneutic** – We believe that Jesus is the full revelation of God and that we should approach the entire bible with Jesus in view.
- **Kingdom People** – We believe that the Kingdom of Jesus is for now and that we, as His body on earth, are an instrument of bringing in more of His reign today.

Tonight we are going to start to look at Relational Theology, which is a term Roger Forster uses to name his particular take on the theology of God's reign, control, knowledge of the future and our freewill. Other churches do hold a similar viewpoint, but they may not give it the same name! Equally, some churches strongly disagree with Roger!! That's ok!!!

The subject has been split into two parts to help us cover the topic. This week we will look at summaries of four alternative views of God's authority and knowledge of the future, including Relational Theology. Next time we will do a more in depth study of Relational Theology. There is further reading suggested at the end of this study and we could spend more time delving into these topics another time if people wanted.

The mainstream views of God's authority and knowledge of the future:

Before we look at them it is worth first saying that none of these views bring into question our salvation. All Christians who hold any of the following views are saved if they trust in Jesus. Secondly, there is a wide range of stances within each theological viewpoint. Finally, all of these theologies are founded in the Bible and believe that God is all-powerful and the sustainer of the universe; the differences occur in how God gets his will done and how he relates to others in creation. It may seem like semantics, but they actually have a profound effect on how you view the Lord's character and His relationship with us, His people.

1. **Calvinism:**

Calvinists believe that God foreknows the future by sovereignly ordaining/causing everything to happen. He causes absolutely everything that happens across all of creation and in essence controls our actions.

Discuss:

- What are the positives of this view?
 - It is reassuring that God is in control and everything has a higher purpose
 - At a cursory glance the Bible clearly talks about the Lord being in control and knowing the future e.g. Isaiah 48:3-5
- What do you think might be the issues with this view?
 - Hard to rationalise a God of love if the Lord causes all suffering, sickness and death
 - He chooses some people to be saved and some to not be saved
 - How can love be love with no free-choice to love?
 - If He makes us do things, are we morally responsible for our sin or hurting others?
 - Why bother praying if God has already planned and decided everything?
 - How does the devil fit into all of this?
 - Why does the Bible say that the Lord regretted making Saul king (1 Sam 15:35) if He made him become king and knew the future outcomes?

Watch Coffee with the Forsters – Is the Future Already Written?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TxApJhDGXfk>

2. **Arminianism:**

Arminians believe that God foreknows all future free choices and actions. Because He is outside time He knows what we will do as He has seen it, but He isn't causing us to do it as we have freewill.

Discuss:

- What are the positives of this view?
 - It allows for freewill
 - Allows room for the fact God isn't causing all sickness, suffering, etc.
- What do you think might be the issues with this view?
 - It can give the impression of a God not involved in our lives. He knows the future and the outcome and has left us to get on with it.
 - Is God bored if He knows all the outcomes?
 - It can be hard to argue away some of the Bible verses about God causing things
 - If God knows what we are going to do, isn't it just the illusion of freewill?!

3. Open Theology:

God foreknows all that will happen and all that might happen. He knows all the future possibilities, but all created beings have freewill to do what they want. We won't take God by surprise as He knows all the possibilities, but He may not know exactly what we will do for certain. Open theology is a form of Aminianism, but it just questions whether God is in or outside time, and so if God does definitively know the final result or not before it happens.

Discuss:

- What are the positives of this view?
 - There is genuine freewill
 - Provides a genuine answer to the problem of evil
 - Helps to understand that prayer matters and makes a difference
- What do you think might be the issues with this view?
 - If God doesn't know the future, can we trust that it will be ok!?
 - How does prophecy work then?
 - It can be hard to argue away some of the Bible verses about God causing things and God seeming to know the future

Watch Coffee with the Forsters – How can a Loving God Allow Suffering?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qfCpfWrhl-E>

Relational Theology:

God foreknows all the future possibilities, but not definitively the final outcomes. He works with human beings who all have freewill to choose to work with Him or not. There are certainties within His plan, things that He knows will definitely happen, and which He will bring about through relationship with humans as He is a relational God. He will never override our moral freewill, but He can control anything within His creation and move us to action if there are no moral repercussions for anyone involved in the action.

Next time we will look at Relational Theology in more detail and explain why it is a good middle ground and answer to many of the objections to the mainstream views.

Further reading suggestions if you are interested in the topic:

If you wish to look at this in more detail, we'd recommend the following books:

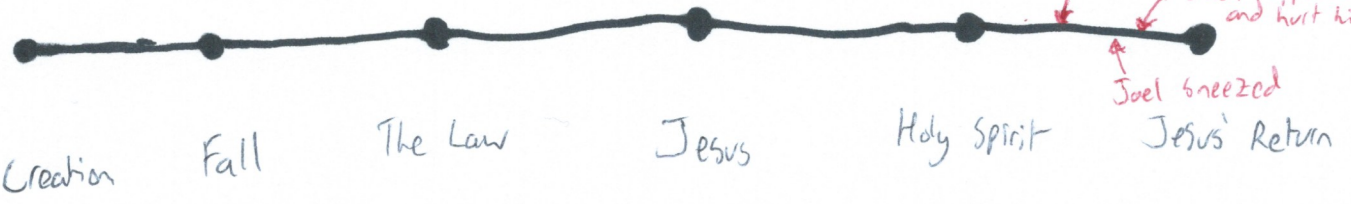
- For a summary of the different theological views (not including Roger's Relational Theology): Chapter 3 of *Across the Spectrum* by Gregory A Boyd and Paul R Eddy
- For a look at how Relational Theology actually effects all of God's interactions with humans: *God's Strategy In Human History Part 1 & Part 2* by Roger Forster and Paul Marston
- For a relatively accessible look at Open Theology: *God of the Possible* and *Is God to Blame?* both by Gregory A Boyd
- For the academics with time on their hands: *Satan and the Problem of Evil* and *God at War* both by Gregory A Boyd

Pray to finish

Calvinism:

- Outside time
- Absolutely everything happens according to God's Will

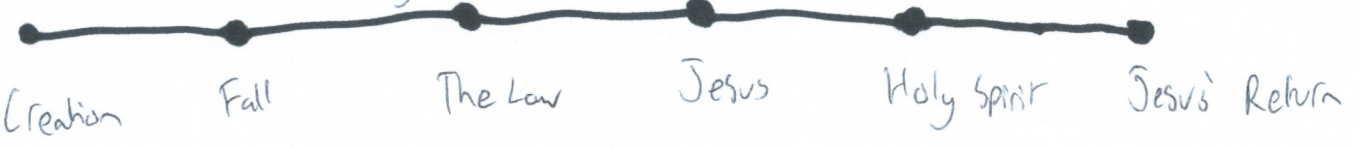
Joel wore pink socks
 Joel tripped over and hurt himself
 Joel sneezed



key events

Arminianism:

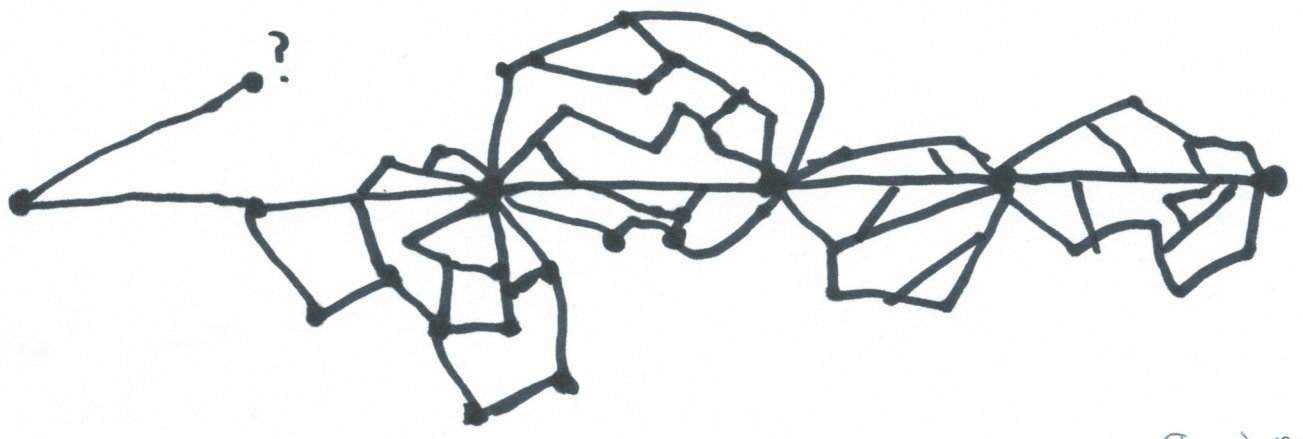
- Outside time
- Not everything happens according to God's will, but he knows exactly what will happen



key events

Open Theology & Relational Theology:

- Inside time
- God has a strategy and plan to reach key events. He knows all possibilities, but not exactly how to get there.



key events

Creation Fall or not fall!?

Extreme and wrong Open Theology!!

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Time →