

*Divine Sovereignty And Human Choice*  
*Seven Theological Truths That Favor Calvinism Over Molinism*

**By Tom Barnes**

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To all the elders with whom I have served and presently serve  
I love you, brothers!

## ABBREVIATIONS

ASB: *Archaeological Study Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.

BAGD: Bauer, Walter, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament* (Chicago: The University Of Chicago Press, 1979).

BDB: Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew And English Lexicon Of The Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, na.).

D & M: H. E. Dana, Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar Of The Greek New Testament* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1955).

DNTT: Colin Brown, Gen. Ed., *The New International Dictionary Of New Testament Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982, repr.).

ESVSB: Wayne Grudem, Gen. Ed. *ESV Study Bible*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2008.

GKC: E. Kautzsch, A. E. Cowley, Ed's., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1988, repr.).

JBTM: *Journal For Baptist Theology And Ministry*.

JETS: *Journal Of The Evangelical Theological Society*.

RSB [2005]: R. C. Sproul, Gen. Ed. *The Reformation Study Bible*. Orlando: Ligonier Ministries, 2005.

RSB [2015]: R. C. Sproul, Gen. Ed. *The Reformation Study Bible*. Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2015.

TDNT: Gerhard Kittel, Gen. Ed., *Theological Dictionary of The New Testament*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984, repr.).

TrinJ.: *Trinity Journal*.

TWOT: R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke, Ed.'s, *Theological Wordbook Of The Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980).

WTJ: *Westminster Theological Journal*.

# CONTENTS

## GETTING STARTED

Introduction .....	5
One, What Is Molinism? .....	19

## PART ONE: GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY

Two, Truth #1: God’s Self-Revealing Purpose: A Starting Point .....	38
Three, Truth #1: God’s Self-Revealing Purpose: Romans 9:22-23 .....	79
Four, A Case Study For Divine Sovereignty And Free Human Choice. ....	100
Five, Truth #2: God Governs All Things .....	112
Six, Truth #3: But God Does Not Govern All Things In The Same Manner .....	161

## PART TWO: HUMAN CHOICES

Seven, Truth #4: How Humans Make Free Choices .....	209
Eight, Truth #5: The Necessity Of Faith-Preceding Regeneration In The Spiritually Dead ...	263
Nine, Truth #6: God’s Initiating and Transforming Grace In Sanctification .....	296

## PART THREE: BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Ten, Truth #7: God’s Sovereignty and Human Choices In Eternal Glorification .....	329
Conclusion .....	337

## APPENDICES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Appendix One, Exegesis Of Acts 4:27-28: A <i>Locus Classicus</i> .....	343
Appendix Two, The Meaning Of “Foreknew” In Romans 8:29 .....	350
Appendix Three, How We Know Paul Is Dealing With Individual Election Unto Salvation In Romans 9 .....	357
Appendix Four, Potential Problems Arising From God’s Governance Of All Things. ....	363
Appendix Five, A Potential Alternative To The Model Proposed Here: Timeless Eternity. ...	378
Bibliography. ....	384

## INTRODUCTION

Television series whose weekly plots revolve around the investigation of crime scenes have become very popular. The attraction stems not only from the life situations of the characters and the well-written plots, but also from the mystery that is always present. In each episode, there is a murder (or more) and some evidence that is collected. Often the evidence can quickly lead to a well-reasoned explanation for what happened. In fact, the proposed account of the crime is so good that the characters can be tempted to stop the investigation and conclude, “We have solved it!” Yet, there is that nagging feeling, the sense that something has been missed, that we must look at all the data again.

Such is the nagging feeling I have toward an explanation for one of the most difficult puzzles followers of Jesus have wrestled with for 2,000 years: the issue of God’s sovereignty and man’s freedom. How can both be true? Before I explain my nagging feelings in regard to one position that is growing in popularity, let me give some background to the issue.

Christians with a high regard for Scripture historically have desired to affirm both of the following biblical tenets: “Humans are free with respect to certain actions and, therefore, responsible for them;” and also, “God is omnipotent in the sense that he has (sovereign, providential) control over all earthly affairs.”<sup>1</sup> That both tenets are important is obvious. After all, if the first is denied, it is difficult to make sense of man’s sin and how God holds him responsible, and if the second is denied, it is hard to grasp how God is in control over our lives, can fulfill his promises, can answer prayers, and also can bring about the ends he desires.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David Basinger, “Divine Control And Human Freedom: Is Middle Knowledge The Answer?” JETS, 36, 1 (March 1993): 55.

<sup>2</sup> Basinger, “Divine Control,” 55.

Since the seventeenth century the two main approaches to the reconciliation of these truths have carried the labels, “Arminianism” and “Calvinism.” Yet, just like with a crime scene that rarely includes a note saying, “I did it,” nowhere in the Bible does God write, “Arminianism is the way to go and forget Calvinism,” or “Hey Calvinism is your right approach!” Any reader of the Scriptures must look at what the Bible says, compile all the evidence like a forensic scientist, and conclude how best to affirm God’s sovereignty and man’s freedom.

Now, what is the position on this topic I mentioned above? Let’s see.

### **Enter Molinism**

Over the last generation a third approach has re-emerged and is growing in popularity.<sup>3</sup> Not only is there a possible momentum behind it, “Dean Zimmerman, who is a prominent Christian philosopher, recently said that ‘of the plethora of views available on divine providence, Molinism probably has the largest percentage of Christian philosophers who would support it.’”<sup>4</sup>

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David M. Ciochi, “Reconciling Divine Sovereignty And Human Freedom, JETS, 37, 3 (September 1994): 396, adds: “...there [is] a mass of biblical material that strongly and clearly implies a tension between the concepts of divine sovereignty and human freedom.... The Christian theological tradition...presents God as the omnipotent, omniscient Creator and human beings as free creatures who are responsible to their Creator for the conduct of their lives. The tension becomes apparent as soon as any attempt is made to develop a coherent explanation of the connections between these concepts.”

<sup>3</sup> John D. Laing, “The Compatibility Of Calvinism And Middle Knowledge,” JETS, 47, 3 (September 2004): 455, wrote: “The doctrine of middle knowledge, [which is another name for Molinism,] has seen a revival of interest in the last twenty years, primarily among philosophers of religion.... However, it has recently enjoyed much attention in theological circles as well.” He adds: “More and more Calvinist thinkers are attempting to incorporate middle knowledge into their systems of thought.”

According to Laing (p. 455, f.n. 10), this revival is largely credited to philosopher Alvin Plantinga (See *The Nature Of Necessity* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1974], 174-80). Matthew A. Postiff, “The Theological Viability Of Middle Knowledge,” A Paper Presented To Dr. William W. Combs For Seminar In Soteriology, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006: 1, credits not only Alvin Plantinga, but also philosopher and theologian, William Lane Craig. Travis James Campbell, “Middle Knowledge: A Reformed Critique” (accessed from monergism.com on April 20, 2015), 1, writes that “Luis de Molina’s solution to the freedom/foreknowledge dilemma has had a revival of sorts in the latter half of the twentieth century, most notably through the efforts of William Lane Craig, Alfred Freddoso, Jonathan Kvanvig, Thomas Flint, and Alvin Plantinga.”

<sup>4</sup> William Lane Craig, in Paul Helm, William Lane Craig, “Calvinism Vs. Molinism: Paul Helm And William Lane Craig,” JBTM, 11, 1 (Spring 2014), 66.

Named for a 16<sup>th</sup> c. Jesuit priest, Luis de Molina, Molinism is put forth both as a way of bringing together the two competing views (Arminianism and Calvinism),<sup>5</sup> and also as a way of explaining how a sovereign God can exercise a strong sense of providence at the same time men can be free in the indeterministic sense.<sup>6</sup>

Part of the appeal of Molinism is its alleged ability to provide a coherent explanation for a strong view of man's freedom along with a strong view of God's sovereignty that seems to fit the biblical witness.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the explanation is much like the crime scene investigator who assesses the evidence and concludes, "This is the explanation for what happened; we have our man." Anecdotally, I have seen Molinism impact Christians in this way.

I first encountered Molinism in my research for a writing project.<sup>8</sup> But I must admit that I spent very little time really looking at it until a good friend of mine, Tim Stratton,<sup>9</sup> began interacting with me about Molinism and wanted my feedback. As a result, I have spent considerable time over the past two years studying it.

Here is where my nagging suspicions about Molinism surfaced. I thought, "Yes, Molinism is, in many ways, an ingenious and very strong approach to this age-old puzzle—one that should not

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<sup>5</sup> William L. Craig, "Middle Knowledge: A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?" in Clark H. Pinnock, Gen. Ed., *The Grace Of God And The Will Of Man* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1995, repr.), 141-164.

<sup>6</sup> Craig, "Middle Knowledge: A Calvinist-Arminian Rapprochement?" 141. Indeterminism holds to libertarian freedom. This view believes humans are free only if they can make a choice or refrain from making that choice and if the choice is not determined. Soft determinism, the view set forth in this book, holds to compatibilistic freedom, believing human choices are free if the person truly wants to make the choice they make, even though it is determined by antecedent movements and conditions. Such a view allows room for God to determine human choices and, at the same time, for them to be free.

<sup>7</sup> William Lane Craig, "The Middle-Knowledge View," in James K. Beilby, Paul R. Eddy, Ed's., *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2001), 125.

<sup>8</sup> Tom Barnes, *Atonement Matters* (Faverdale North, Darlington, England: EP, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Tim is not only a good friend, but also has been a pastor in a neighboring town here in Nebraska. Tim is a very gifted apologist, philosopher, theologian, and author who is currently working on his Ph.D. at North West University in South Africa. He is also the executive director of Free Thinking Ministries, and an adjunct professor at Nebraska Christian College.



be ignored or minimized. Yes, it does seem to form a coherent explanation. However, there were some bits of biblical evidence that did not appear to me to be consistent with Molinism.

### Enter “Green Eggs And Ham”

Before uncovering in Molinism what has left me unconvinced, I want to take us a step further in understanding the different approaches of Calvinism (what I will argue for in this book) and Molinism. David Basinger offers the following colorful illustration to help:

*Let us suppose that I want my six-year-old daughter Nissa to read ten pages of Dr. Seuss’ **Green Eggs and Ham** before bed tonight. If I possess the power of the God of [Calvinism], I can simply irresistibly influence her will in such a way that she will decide freely to read the pages in question. If I possess the power of the...[Molinist], then I...know how she will respond freely in every possible situation in which I could request (in a noncoercive manner) that she read the ten pages I have in mind. I know, for example, how she would respond if I asked her in a soft voice right after dinner, how she would respond if I waited until right before she goes to bed, how she would respond if I told her that her teacher wanted her to read these pages, and so on. Now let us suppose that I see with my [omniscience] that Nissa will freely choose to read the desired pages if I ask her to do so in a soft voice right before bed. In this case I again possess the power to control what Nissa freely reads. By asking her to read the desired pages in a soft voice right before bed, I can bring it about that she will do exactly what I want, but she will still be acting freely in the sense [proposed by the Molinist].<sup>10</sup>*

“Simply-put, Molinism argues that God perfectly accomplishes his [purpose] in free creatures through the use of his omniscience.”<sup>11</sup>

*Since God knows prior to his decision to create what any possible creature would do in any possible circumstances, God in deciding what creatures to create and which circumstances to bring about or permit ultimately controls and directs the course of world history to his desired ends, yet without violating in any way the freedom of his creatures.<sup>12</sup>*

### Enter Crime Scene Investigators, Again

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<sup>10</sup> David Basinger, “Divine Control And Human Freedom,” 60.

<sup>11</sup> Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation And Sovereignty* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2010, Kindle Edition), in the Introduction.

<sup>12</sup> Craig, “Rapprochement?” 152.

So, here is where I had that same experience that forensic scientists may have after thinking they had the accurate explanation in view, only to sense something is not quite right. As I went back through the biblical evidence again, two major findings came into focus. To begin, though I have tremendous respect for both the proponents and the position of Molinism (I believe it is the best model that advocates libertarian freedom), I became more and more convinced it does not form the best explanation for how the Bible views God's sovereignty and man's freedom.

Additionally, I reaffirmed that Calvinism truly does serve as the best explanation of the evidence based upon seven key points in the biblical material—points with which Molinism does not fit. These seven theological truths will give direction to this book.

### **Enter My Purpose, Plan, And Profit**

With what I have said to this point, my purpose should be coming into focus. First and foremost, I want to take us toward a better understanding of what the Bible says about this subject and how to hold together both important elements (divine sovereignty and human freedom). In order to accomplish this outcome, my plan is to look at the issue through the lenses of Molinism and Calvinism—showing how each holds up in relation to the biblical evidence. My conclusion will be that the latter does a better job than the former. In fact, one of the implications of this book is that soft deterministic Calvinism provides a better model for explaining the biblical evidence than any indeterministic model.

More specifically, the plan includes a more thorough description of Molinism's position in Chapter One. Then, in the remainder of the book we examine the seven key theological truths. In Chapter Two we introduce the first truth as we will look at what the Bible says about God's eternal purpose and what bearing this has upon why God created and why the events of the world have transpired as they have (with the presence of evil, a continually broken world, and the

judgment of sinners). Here we discover nothing revealed about God’s eternal purpose that necessitates libertarian human freedom, the driving force behind Molinism. Chapter Three looks more closely at an important passage dealing with God’s purpose, especially as it relates to salvation—Romans 9—a passage that also finds itself in the heat of the Calvinist-Molinist debate. Chapters Four-Six show that God governs all things, but he does not govern all things in the same manner—key theological truths two and three. In these chapters we will not only see how God can exercise absolute, free, and unconditional sovereignty through meticulous providence—and this still leave room for man’s compatibilistic freedom, we will also discover the model or pattern for human freedom is divine freedom. In Chapters Seven through Ten we will turn to the key truths that have to do with human freedom (#’s 4-7): How humans make free choices (Seven), why God’s effective grace and regenerating Holy Spirit work must precede man’s faith and repentance (Eight), and then why the Calvinist views of divine sovereignty and human freedom are necessary for what the Bible teaches about Christian growth (Nine) and the future glorification of the Christian (Ten). In these last four chapters we will also discover in more detail the problems with Molinism’s commitment to indeterminism.

At this point some may think, “Tom, this debate has raged for the entire history of the Church and some of the best Christian minds have disagreed. What profit is there in giving time to this?” Randy Alcorn has wisely answered that question:

*I believe one compelling reason to study [this subject] is to **better** understand what we cannot **fully** understand. And in the case of God’s sovereignty and human choice, while it’s not imperative that I understand everything, it is important that I believe in both. If I don’t believe in God’s sovereignty, I’ll either despair or imagine that I must carve out my own path. If I don’t believe in my freedom to make meaningful choices, I’ll either give up on life or not take responsibility for my decisions.<sup>13</sup>*

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<sup>13</sup> Randy Alcorn, “God’s Sovereignty And Meaningful Human Choice: Why Is This Tough And Controversial Issue Worth Studying And Discussing?” *Eternal Perspectives*, Fall/Winter (2014): 7.

I wholeheartedly agree! As we will discover throughout this book, belief in God's absolute and unconditional sovereignty will increase our awe of God, bring significant comfort and encouragement for us, and will enable us to grasp how we interact with the gospel.<sup>14</sup> We dare not blunt these important outcomes by making God's sovereign decrees dependent upon or limited by human choice in order to preserve libertarian human freedom, as does the Molinist.

What is more, if we try and hold to the view of sovereignty I will advocate without, at the same time, seeing what importance the Bible places on our choices and responsibility (as do some popular forms of Calvinism), we will set ourselves up for an undisciplined life that fails in many ways.

My goal is that readers will understand that both God's absolute and unconditional sovereignty, exercised through his meticulous providence, and compatibilistic human freedom not only fit with the biblical material better than Molinism, but bring much in the way of practical application. My goal also is that we will be prevented from abandoning belief in this view of divine sovereignty and human choice in the face of challenges to it.

### **Enter My Approach**

As I close out this introduction, I will say a few words about how I will approach the purpose and plan I have outlined.

#### *A Fair Evaluation Of Molinism*

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<sup>14</sup> As will become clear throughout the book, I believe we cannot accurately grasp how a person responds to the gospel in saving faith and how the gospel strengthens the Christian at every point in her sanctification apart from the view of God's sovereignty and man's freedom as set forth in this book. For a helpful treatment of the practical impact of divine sovereignty as taught in this book, see Jerry Bridges, "Does Divine Sovereignty Make A Difference In Everyday Life?" in Thomas R. Schreiner, Bruce A. Ware, *The Grace Of God, The Bondage Of The Will*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 203-214.

One of the benefits that I have gleaned from my study over the last two years is a better understanding of Molinism. This has strengthened my view of God and led me to refine and improve my view of the interplay of divine sovereignty and human freedom. I have learned that when it comes to the human will and how it functions—especially for the believer—the approaches of Calvinism and Molinism can come very close at places.

So, I will not shy away from affirming where a Molinistic stance could be possible in the biblical texts we examine. And I will show where the two views come close together. As will become clear in the book, the way forward for the Calvinist and Molinist to find common ground is not for the former to adopt middle knowledge or Molinism. After all, that would require the Calvinist to give in and change on the key theological truths seen in this book.<sup>15</sup> In it all, my goal is to be fair in my treatment of Molinism, at the same time I help us to understand better the Bible's teaching on divine sovereignty and human freedom.

#### *A Fair Presentation And Evaluation Of Calvinism*

At the same time, I desire to present and evaluate Calvinism fairly. Though the soft deterministic Calvinism presented in this book is in line with classic forms of Calvinism, such as that presented in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *London Baptist Confession* of 1689 (especially chapters three and nine in both works), I do believe that Calvinism can be presented in print, preaching, and teaching in ways that distort what Scripture teaches. My desire is to be precise in definitions and to bring greater understanding to both divine sovereignty and human

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<sup>15</sup> Though Craig, "Rapprochement," 142, argues that middle knowledge provides the opportunity for "the development of friendlier relations between...groups of people who have been enemies" (Webster's, on-line, on Rapprochement), namely between Arminians and Calvinists, I do not believe it is middle knowledge per se that affords the rapprochement. After all, as Richard A. Muller, "Grace, Election, And Contingent Choice: Arminius's Gambit And The Reformed Response," in Thomas R. Schreiner, Bruce A. Ware, Ed's, *The Grace Of God, the Bondage Of The Will*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 265-66, rightly argues, for this to happen, the Calvinist would have to "concede virtually all the issues in the debate" and adopt an Arminian/Molinist approach."

freedom and the interplay of the two. This means we must do more than gain an overview of the issues from a brief flyover. We will need to “land the plane,” get out of it, and explore the terrain at many points if we are to gain understanding.

At the same time, I hope to answer well those who accuse Calvinism of making God the author of sin, of necessarily de-motivating Christians to engage in missions and evangelism, and also of setting forth tenets that are not affirmed in Scripture.<sup>16</sup>

### *A Biblical Approach*

At the heart of this book is my conviction that the biblical evidence (a few key theological truths) leads us to the conclusion that how God is sovereign, how man is free and responsible, and how these relate are best answered by that systematic approach known as soft deterministic Calvinism. So, in other words, when we look closely at the Bible’s teachings, at theology, we find enough evidence to lead us to the approach I will present, and also to lead us away from Molinism. Our theology must shape our philosophy.

Two follow-up points must be made.

To begin, in saying this I am not suggesting that Molinists do not seek to be biblical and they only care about philosophy. Such would not be the case. The Molinist authors I have interacted with extensively seem to care very much about coming to a biblical understanding of the issue—albeit one that is also philosophically informed.

Next, to say that I am presenting the systematic approach known as Calvinism is not to say that first and foremost I am starting with a system and trying to force it upon Scripture. As John Piper has written:

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<sup>16</sup> Paige Patterson makes all these accusations in the Forward to Kenneth Keathley’s book, *Salvation And Sovereignty*.

*I do not begin as a Calvinist and defend a system. I begin as a Bible-believing Christian who wants to put the Bible above all systems of thought. But over the years – many years of struggle – I have deepened in my conviction that Calvinistic teachings on the five points are biblical and therefore true, and therefore a precious pathway into deeper experiences of God’s grace.<sup>17</sup>*

My experience is the same as Piper’s. Particularly in relation to divine sovereignty and human freedom, I believe the biblical evidence at some key points is strong and clear enough to lead to the conclusion that soft deterministic Calvinism is the scriptural approach. And so, I do not agree with those who seem to argue that the Bible does not give us enough direction to decide on an approach and so we must make the decision based on philosophy.<sup>18</sup>

### *Mystery, But Not Paradox*

One common question that arises in debates over divine sovereignty and human freedom has to do with whether or not the matter is a paradox. The answer depends on how a person defines the word.<sup>19</sup> There are three main approaches to the definition.

To begin, there are those who take the word “paradox” to speak of a statement or theory that appears to contradict itself, but upon further examination it is found to be true and not a contradiction.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> John Piper, *Five Points: Toward A Deeper Experience Of God’s Grace* (Fern, Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013), 9.

<sup>18</sup> Craig, “The Middle Knowledge View,” 125. See also David Hunt, “A Simple Foreknowledge Response” (To William Lane Craig, “The Middle Knowledge View”), in James K. Beilby, Paul R. Eddy, Ed’s., *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2001), 149.

<sup>19</sup> See also David M. Ciochi, “Reconciling Divine Sovereignty And Human Freedom,” *JETS*, 37, 3 (September 1994): 396.

<sup>20</sup> R. C. Sproul, Jr., *Almighty Over All: Understanding The Sovereignty Of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 39. Sproul distinguishes a paradox from a contradiction—i.e. “when we affirm two different things which cannot both be true” (37).

Related to this is what Ciochi, “Reconciling:” 397, calls the “surprising fact paradox,” i.e. “a statement which is surprising, contrary to general expectation or belief, but not necessarily having even the appearance of self contradiction.” Ciochi discounts this kind of paradox for the sovereignty-freedom tension since it at least has the appearance of contradiction.

Next, there are those who take the word “paradox” to speak of a statement or theory that appears to contradict itself and yet, upon further examination, we cannot come to see that or how it can be reconciled—it remains a mystery. Based upon the conviction that God will not contradict himself in his character, revelation, and/or how he works, the assumption is that there is no true contradiction, but how this is so cannot be explained.<sup>21</sup>

Additionally, there are those who believe some paradoxes involve contradiction. For example, Kenneth Keathley writes: “[Many]...Calvinists appeal to mystery, but what we are dealing with is not a mystery, but a contradiction. An epistemic paradox and a logical paradox are different. [The former] results from insufficient information, but a logical paradox indicates an error either in one’s starting assumptions or his reasoning processes.”<sup>22</sup>

If we were to adopt the first definition, I could affirm that the issue at hand is a paradox. If we hold to the third view (more precisely having to do with logical paradox), I must definitely affirm that we are not dealing with paradox. In regard to the second approach, I can come close, yet, I do believe that even though we cannot fully comprehend or explain everything about God’s sovereignty and how it interacts with human freedom and even though we cannot rid ourselves of all the mystery, nevertheless, I do believe we can explain enough to see how there is no contradiction.

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Also related is what Ciocchi (397) terms “semantic paradox,” i.e. “the appearance of self-contradiction by using a word or words equivocally.” The example he gives: “Captain Gomez outranks Captain Smith,” a situation that is clarified when we find out that Gomez is in the U.S. Navy and Smith is in the U.S. Air Force. An example in the Bible is “many who are first will be last, and the last first” (Mt. 19:30). Again, he clarifies that this is not what the sovereignty-freedom tension involves.

<sup>21</sup> Joe Rigney, *The Things Of Earth: Treasuring God By Enjoying His Gifts* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015, Kindle Edition), ch. 2, seems to take this approach. See also David Basinger, “Biblical Paradox: Does Revelation Challenge Logic?” *JETS*, 30, 2 (June 1987): 205. Ciocchi, “Reconciling:” 397, refers to this as an “epistemic paradox.”

<sup>22</sup> Keathley, *Salvation*, 148. Ciocchi, “Reconciling:” 397-98, seems to agree with Keathley’s definitions.



Given the fact that some believe “paradox” can and does include contradiction, I think it best not to use the term to refer to the position I affirm. I do hold there is some mystery in that we cannot explain every detail of the issue—for example, though we can explain some things about the decrees of God and though we can explain some things about the interface of God’s causative and permissive governance in relation to man’s will, there remains mystery at each one of these places in the issue.<sup>23</sup> Notice that I am not advocating that the entire issue or even most of the issue is a mystery. Like both Molinist and Calvinist writers, I believe that mystery is often advocated too soon and so the process of understanding what the Bible says is preempted.<sup>24</sup>

Given both the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture<sup>25</sup> (Dt. 6:6-7; Pss. 19:7; 119:130) and that of the incomprehensibility of God<sup>26</sup> (Dt. 29:29; Is. 45:15; Rom. 11:33-34), I am not surprised that we can say a lot about divine sovereignty and human freedom—understanding and seeing clearly much about it, but at the same time, we cannot fully comprehend it all—especially as it relates to the eternal purpose of God and how he carries out that purpose. It is logical, but not fully understood by man. Donald Westblade makes this same point when he writes of Jonathan Edwards:

*[Edwards] recounts his experience of attempting to convince a thirteen-year-old boy that a cube of 2-inch sides had eight times the volume of a cube with 1-inch sides. Nothing he said or demonstrated could prevail on the boy to accept this as truth and not absurdity. “And why should*

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<sup>23</sup> This definition of “mystery” is affirmed both by Keathley, *Salvation*, in the Introduction, and Basinger, “Biblical Paradox:” 205. One of the things Paige Patterson does get right (Keathley, *Salvation*, in Forward), is that Molinists locate mystery in the omniscience of God and Calvinists in the will of God (I would say more precisely in the will and how he carries out that will).

<sup>24</sup> Craig, *Only Wise God*, 15; Sproul, Jr., *Almighty*, 44.

<sup>25</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000, repr.), 108, defines the clarity of Scripture as follows: “...the Bible is written in such a way that its teachings are able to be understood by all who will read it seeking God’s help and being willing to follow it.”

<sup>26</sup> Grudem, *Systematic*, 149: Not that God cannot be understood at all, but that he cannot be fully understood.

*we not suppose that there may be some things that are true that may be as much above our understandings and as difficult to them as this truth was to this boy?" he asks (no. 652).<sup>27</sup>*

### *A Discussion With Family, Not The Enemy*

The final point I will make about my approach has to do with the way I view Molinists and the tenor I desire to strike. They are fellow followers of Jesus Christ and so this is a family discussion. Sometimes when the discussions on this topic get heated, one or more parties is not willing to listen to the other, which is a less-than-wise approach. Proverbs 18:2 reminds us: “A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.”

Additionally, love calls us to give each other the benefit of the doubt and believe the best about one another. Paul puts it this way in 1 Corinthians 13:7: “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” This love and unity are important since they form the ultimate apologetic to the world (John 13:34-35; 17:21-23),<sup>28</sup> they are important to God, and so they should be important to us (See 1 John 3-4). What this means is that we will want to discuss this all-important issue in a way that builds each other up, rather than tears down (see Eph. 4:29-32). In fact, I will go so far as to say that how we go about this discussion is as important as the issues we discuss. We should not “check our Christianity at the door” when blogging or debating our areas of disagreement.

For Calvinists, Molinists are not the Visigoths at the gate of the kingdom, nor should Calvinists be for Molinists. We are brothers and sisters in Christ who should be able to lock arms in love, ministry, and service for the glory of God and the benefit of others—believer and non-

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<sup>27</sup> Donald J. Westblade, “The Sovereignty of God In The Theology Of Jonathan Edwards,” in Sam Storms, Justin Taylor, Ed’s., *For the Fame Of His Name: Essays In Honor Of John Piper* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 124.

<sup>28</sup> I am dependent upon Timothy George, John Woodbridge, *The Mark Of Jesus: Loving In A Way The World Can See* (Chicago: Moody, 2005), and also Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Mark of The Christian* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), for this idea.

believer. In fact, I would suggest that if we can engage in a family discussion without the heat, we will gain much more benefit from it.

Though I believe the issues and differences are important, nevertheless, my prayer is that Molinists and Calvinists can similarly follow the example of Charles Simeon and John Wesley in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. H.C. G. Moule has popularized the following account of what transpired when the young Calvinist, Charles Simeon, visited the aging Arminian, John Wesley:<sup>29</sup>

*Sir, I understand that you are called an Arminian; and I have been...called a Calvinist; and therefore I suppose we are to draw daggers. But before I consent to begin the combat, with your permission I will ask you a few questions. ...Sir, do you feel yourself...so depraved that you would never have thought of turning to God, if God had not first put it into your heart?*

*Yes, I do indeed.*

*And do you utterly despair of recommending yourself to God by anything you can do; and look for salvation solely through the blood and righteousness of Christ?*

*Yes, solely through Christ.*

*...supposing you were at first saved by Christ, are you...to save yourself afterwards by your own works?*

*No, I must be saved by Christ from first to last.*

*[Since] you were first turned by the grace of God, are you...to keep yourself by your own power?*

*No.*

*What then, are you to be upheld every hour and every moment by God...?*

*Yes, altogether.*

*And is all your hope in the grace and mercy of God to preserve you unto His heavenly kingdom?*

*Yes, I have no hope but in Him.*

*Then, Sir, with your leave I will put up my dagger again....*

Lord, may that spirit be preserved among us as I write this book and may it be so in subsequent discussions as differences are discussed.

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<sup>29</sup> Taken from John Piper's brief biographical sketch of Charles Simeon, found at [desiringgod.org](http://desiringgod.org). Piper was citing H.C.G. Moule, *Charles Simeon* (London: InterVarsity, 1948), 79f.