

Transcript 198

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the God Questions podcast. This is episode I guess 8 in kind of our series on what is Calvinism? But for the last two, we've been primarily covering alternatives to Calvinism. We did an episode on what is Arminianism right before this one. And today we're going to be discussing really two or three other common and popular alternatives to Calvinism. Just to help you understand, Calvinism and Arminianism are not the only two ways to view these. So today specific we're going to start off with the conversation on Molinism also some as pronounced Molinism. And this is actually the view Jeff prefers. So joining me as always, Jeff, the managing editor of bibleref.com and Kevin, the managing editor of gotquestions.org.

Shea Houdmann

So Jeff, start us off, give us what is, what is Molinism, Molinism and how does it differ? And just so everyone knows we actually did two episodes, Jeff and I recorded two episodes on Molinism a couple of years ago. So if you look back in the archives, episode 18 is where that is. Where it's a much more in depth conversation of Molinism than we're going to cover today. But Jeff, what is Molinism?

Jeff Laird

I'm glad that we had a chance to set it up the way we have were we've had several episodes that kind of lead into these questions because it helps set the right frame of mind. It's that reminder that these are all human systems. You have to be careful that we don't read the Bible just assuming certain things. And I think that's part of what happens is we have a tendency to, we have a reformed or Armenian or whatever mindset, and that means that when we read Scripture, that seems really obvious to us. And then we even define terms according to those.

So when somebody says something from a different perspective we wind up messing it up. So we're set up for this idea that we need to be careful about what we really think and believe, understand that there is some level of mystery in this that some of these things are just going to be difficult to understand, and especially that all of these are meant to be sort of intra faith.

These are things that really are sort of backdoor, behind the scenes, in theory, casual conversations between believers. These are not the kinds of things that we need to be arguing about in front of non believers or using to cause any kind of a division.

Jeff Laird

In my view, and again, this is a good, I'm glad that we had the chance to set this up because when we talk about Molinism, the mindset helps. In my view, the typical Calvinist and Armenian view kind of leads to contradiction. Both of them do. In part it's because both of them will take certain verses of Scripture and say that verse means exactly what it says exactly as it's written, precisely and plainly as it is. But then other verses they will look at and say, well, it doesn't really mean that we need to redefine that, we need to turn, that we need to change that. And again, it seems like they only make sense if you read Scripture assuming those things, especially when it comes to the verses that you need to sort of push off to the side. And when we talk about contradictions, we're talking about things like you know, God is 100% sovereign and anytime you say that somebody other than God made a choice, you're saying he's not sovereign. And then we we compare that to you know, well, God is not the author of sin. Now, in in my view, that's that seems or feels contradictory. I understand that there's there's discussions and that there are responses to that. Or on the Armenian side, there's the idea that God is perfectly omniscient. He knows everything and everything that would happen, and yet he doesn't choose the people who are going to be saved. So you see things like that where you get these, these, these things that just seem like they're contrary and the typical response is, well, that's a mystery. And I struggle with using that term in those circumstances because I believe that those are what I would call below the line. In other words, those are within the realm of human

understanding and human experience. So they sound like they are flatly contradictory. In other words, we are defining a term one way, then defining that same term another way. Or we have two ideas that just do not coordinate with each other. Where I think mystery is appropriate is when we look at something and we say this is not contradictory, but this question that I have is beyond human understanding. It's about the nature of God.

Jeff Laird

That, to an extent, is where Molinism comes in. And there are aspects of God's nature that we recognize are not contradictory, they're just beyond our full understanding. How can God be eternal? You know what does it mean for God to be uncreated or to be a Trinity, or to be self-sufficient? None of those things are contradictory. Some of them are logically necessary, but they're hard for us to actually fully grasp. So Molinism asks the question of how can we read everything that we see in scripture and take it as it's written without winding up with contradiction?

Jeff Laird

And in a nutshell, what you wind up with is this idea that God can omnipotently, omnisciently and self sufficiently without anybody else know before he creates, every possible thing he could create, every scenario, every quirk, every atom, every little tiny change. He knows all the ways he could possibly create. He also knows all of the free will decisions that creatures would make in any of those creations. That's the sticking point for some people with Molinism. And that's where we talk about the mystery idea because we asked the question how can God know free will decisions that are going to be made. But we do see things in Scripture that support those ideas.

Jeff Laird

Again, we've talked about this in more detail in other podcasts. So God knows all possible ways he could create. God knows all possible decisions that could be made. Then God decides this is where he makes a choice. He chooses to create one of those possible ways that he creates.

When that happens, God creates and in that sense he chooses, he elects, he selects he predestines everything that's going to happen in that. But at the same time, every decision that's made is still made according to free will. In other words, you have a means by which God can say I'm not going to interfere with free will. I'm just going to put people in circumstances where they will freely choose what I want them to choose. There again, how does that work? How can God choose something for us according to free will? Well, that's moved that above the line.

That's again, it's like asking how can God be eternal? How can God be a Trinity?

Jeff Laird

So Molinism as it's argued from would say that God is 100% sovereign. And man is 100% responsible for everything that happens. That God allows things. That means God is not the author of evil, that he has reasons to allow for free will. And the biggest problem is that that they call the grounding objection, which is the claim that if God doesn't actually create it, how can God know something if it's not actually true and he didn't actually create it? Typical response, that is to say that's the same thing with creation in general. If we're gonna say that God can't know what free creatures would decide because he hadn't done it yet and he hadn't created yet, then we'd have to say that God didn't know anything that was gonna happen in creation until he created it. Cause you'd have the same problem. How can God know something that hasn't happened and he hasn't created.

Jeff Laird

So by comparison to these other systems that we've used, Molinism has its own little flower. It's roses. It's not in the same order as Tulip and Daisy, but those are r,o,s,e,s. Radical depravity, which is the idea that everything is affected by sin. Overcoming grace, that God expresses grace that all people are exposed to. Sovereign election, meaning that God 100% decides, chooses who is going to come to salvation. But he does that by creating such that we make a free decision. Eternal assurance is basically the same things internal security. And singular redemption, which is more or less the idea of unlimited atonement. So those are the basic ideas

of how Molinism operates.

Jeff Laird

I find that to be a system that works. When I was going through the process of trying to understand how do I handle, you know, these different verses. God wants everyone to be saved. The Potter and the clay you have to choose. I would have called you, but you resisted. You refused to come to me. You know, all of these different things. And the thought that went through my mind as an engineer was I'm capable of changing things early in the system and knowing what's going to happen, why couldn't God do the same thing? Now that's not nearly Molinism, and it's not a great analogy, but that's what led me in that direction. So for me, that gives me a biblical means that I can look at and say this makes sense to me. I can understand how God can be totally sovereign, totally omniscient, completely in control. And I can be 100% free and 100% responsible. And God is not responsible for sin. It is something that he is allowing because it is part of the creation that he has. So that's the basic just of how Molinism works. Some people like it, some people don't. But that is essentially the way that I've understood it. And the way I've tried to phrase it to people.

Kevin Stone

And you know, the more I hear of Molinism, the more I like it. I mean it just it makes a lot of sense. And I I really, I I really like learning about it. But I have to, I have to ask because Jeff, when you're talking about the God knowing all of the possibilities, God knew every possible decision that everyone would ever be able to make and what the outcomes of those would be, and then he chose the creation that we see the actual creation. But I always think when when I hear that type of of explanation, I I think of the Marvel Cinematic Universe of all things. But in Avengers Infinity War there is that pretty important scene where Doctor Strange uses the the time stone to take a look at all the different possibilities that would eventuate given in their fight against Thanos. And so he sees like 14,000,605 different possible endings. But there's only one possible course of action, in which the the heroes actually win. And so they work toward that.

And then, of course, the heroes do win in the in the next movie. But is that? Is that an accurate metaphor for what Molinism is presenting?

Jeff Laird

I think it gets to the same thing that we have when we talk about things like the Trinity where anytime, any analogy we make is always going to fall short in some sense because I think that it serves well to get the general idea. In other words, in a sense, in that case, Strange looks ahead. He sees all the possibilities. He does what he can do to actuate one of them. That at least puts the idea into the mind that he's not forcing anybody to do anything. He's not mind controlling people and making them do it. But he's choosing one of those paths and going forward. Now obviously the biggest, clearest difference is that Strange is very limited in what he can see, what he can understand, and what he can do. So if you take that same idea and multiply it you know, by an exponent of trillions to where God is capable of understanding every spin of every atom and quark and everything that would happen. He has much, much more. He has perfect and sovereign control over everything that's actually gonna happen. So the analogy works as a way to get the idea into the mind, but it's not exactly perfect.

Jeff Laird

There are scriptures that also help with that. Again, we've talked about this with more detail on podcasts, but we talk about this idea of middle knowledge. And there's verses and scripture that support that. Essentially, that's just an if then idea. For quick reference, some really important ones are Matthew 11:21 to 23, Matthew 23:37, John 15:22 through 24 and then in the old testament, and we have Isaiah 48:17 through 19 and a really important story in First Samuel 23 versus 6 to 14. And that one is in a sense the closest parallel to sort of the Doctor Strange ish thing. David asks God, if I stay here are these men going to come after me? And God says yes. Or I think actually if he just says, are these men going to come after me? God says yes. So David leaves and the men don't come after him. Well, God wasn't lying. God wasn't wrong. God was expressing and if you do this, this is the choice they will make. He knew if you did that, it

would be different and you see that in there. So God is choosing by his sovereignty to allow us free will decisions. That doesn't mean he can't override free will. There are times I think you see in Scripture where God really does reach down and force certain decisions on the people. At least it seems that way. And that's OK. I think he's still sovereignly allowed to do that. But the Molinist view would be that he chooses to use free will for whatever reason he wants.

Shea Houdmann

Now, Jeff, I think what what Kevin brought up with the whole Infinity War and end game analogy, we discussed that briefly back in episode 18, and I think back then I expressed that I find Molinism fascinating. I have no disagreement with it in the sense of denying it's that actually could be how God is operating and all this. The only I wouldn't call it a concern, the question is I don't know the scripture explicitly teaches Molinism. That's kind of the it's is it a very plausible explanation for how God is operating? Yes, it is. Is it explicitly taught in scripture? I don't know that it is, but that doesn't necessarily mean that it's wrong, that it's not actually isn't the right explanation. But it's just similar to Calvinism and Arminianism, and they think no this system is perfectly biblical and the Bible backs every single point that teaches, when there's a whole millions of Christians who on the other side, who disagree that that's what the Bible teaches so. If you want to point out that a weakness of Molinism is that it's not explicitly taught in Scripture, well, a lot of people contend the exact same things about Calvinism and Arminianism. And it's kind of as we've gone on before when we talk about mystery and being willing to admit that I do not perfectly understand how God's sovereignty works with human responsibility free will. That's not to say that they contradict. That just says I don't perfectly understand what the actual explanation is. And so in that sense, if Molinism turned out to be true, I'm not going to be surprised. I'm not going to be shocked. I'm not, I'm definitely not going to argue with God about it. But yeah, it's if, if nothing else, it is biblically plausible. It explains the issues in a different way that Calvinism and Arminianism do. And I'm, I think, more people should at least be familiar with

what it teaches because I think it really does cause us, it challenges us to think outside of the traditional Calvinism and Arminianism boxes.

Jeff Laird

The thing that I like the most about it, at least for me, is the idea that it it does push this. We're always going to get to a point of going I don't understand. This seems like it's beyond me. For me, the biggest advantage is as I see it, Molinism sets that bar somewhere that human beings can't understand. It's just we don't know this because it's a question of how do how can God be God. That's really what the question is whether, as in my opinion, in Calvinism or Arminianism, that question is somewhere where we can understand. We're just seeing something that looks like a sort of a blatant contradiction.

Jeff Laird

It also has uses in other ways. There's ways to explain the problem of evil and all sorts of other things that are not necessarily part and parcel of Molinism, but they're in there. So I would agree it's got uses, it's got value. But again, these are all human systems. These are all behind the scenes sort of conversations we don't need to hang our hat. That's where we get in trouble is when we read the Bible and we just have to defend the ISM to the point where it becomes identical to our faith. That's where we get in trouble. So as long as we take the open minded view and stay inside the biblical bounds, I think we're OK.

Kevin Stone

There's another system man made system that kind of falls between the Calvinism position and the Armenian position, and that is Amyraldism . And I usually identify myself, you know, if I'm if I'm asked, you know, where I fall, I'll take that middle approach. I'll make take that middle ground and say I am, I'm probably pretty close to Amyraldism. And that would basically be 4 point Calvinism. So just to just briefly review the five points of Calvinism, full Calvinism would teach total depravity. That's the T so we're all affected by sin to such an extent that we cannot seek God even if we wanted to. We don't want to, but we couldn't even if we did.

Unconditional election, that's the u of the Tulip. In eternity past God chose who would be saved. The L is limited atonement. Christ died to atone for the sins of the elect only, he did not die for the non elect. And then irresistible grace would be the 4th point. And God works in the heart of the elect in order to regenerate them and give them the new birth. Give them even the faith to believe in that regeneration process. And then the fifth point would be perseverance of the Saints. God keeps the elect. He keeps them, he preserves them all the way to heaven. And so that's five point Calvinism.

Kevin Stone

Amyraldism would say, let's get rid of that third point. We're going to jettison the L so we end up with tuij, I guess if we tried to make a an acronym out of it. But it instead of teaching limited atonement, Amyraldism teaches unlimited atonement. That is, Christs sacrifice provided for the salvation of everyone. God's grace is available to everyone. And it's only effective for those who believe, because faith is still necessary. It's only actualized for those who believe and and so not everyone is going to be saved. But the the grace is there. And the the offer is genuine to come to Jesus and to be saved. So basically four point Calvinism takes that middle of the road approach. That's that's basically where I where I fall. That's where I land on on this whole whole thing of being saved. The process of salvation.

Kevin Stone

There's also 3 point Calvinism where for the three pointers they usually will also get rid of the I of the Tulip, they'll get rid of irresistible grace. So. So they'll say that grace can actually be resisted. God's working in the heart, and you can say no to the Holy Spirit and and quench his work and and go from there. So couple of different things there. And I I think that that 3 point Calvinism actually gets pretty pretty close to provisionism, which I kind of like the sound of provisionism as well.

Jeff Laird

I think that the one thing that's cool about Amyraldism is it's the only system that has its own Christmas carol. And I'll let people look that up.

Shea Houdmann

That's that, that's news to me. I'll have to look that up myself.

Jeff Laird

Oh, you're gonna hate me when you find what it is.

Shea Houdmann

OK, so if four point Calvinism if there there's really not an official position of Got Questions Ministries. If we had one it'd be something along the lines. I mean I I keep saying that we find Calvinism to be closer to the truth than Arminianism. And as you go through the different five points in the five episodes that encourage our listeners to watch or listen to those, you see when we get to the limited atonement. That's the one where, ok, there are at least a few scripture passages that seem to clearly and directly contradict the idea of limited atonement, that Jesus died only for the elect. And so full Calvinists will say that Amyraldism or four point Calvinism is logically inconsistent. And we would respond with well, at least it's biblical in the sense of we're trying to take into account what the Bible actually says and not twisting the verse like First John 2:2 beyond what it clearly and explicitly says. So is 4 point Calvinism logically consistent? I'll leave that to the logicians to decide, but at least it can be supported scripturally. And so that's kind of the position that Kevin leans towards the same with me. As we've talked in previous episodes, if you deny one point of any of the systems it impacts how you view the others.

Shea Houdmann

And so again, I encourage you to go back and listen to this on each of the five points we talked about, OK, there's yes, take something like total depravity. No one can come to Christ unless God draws him. It's John 6:44. OK, what does actually God drawing look like? So does it mean God has to actually completely regenerate them, create faith in them so that they believe? Or is

it just an opening of eyes, softening of hearts to enable them to believe?

Shea Houdmann

So even each of the points has connections to the others and they impact each other. So I'm fully aware that you take out limited atonement it does impact unconditional election, total depravity, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints and so forth. But four point Calvinism it seems to be the one that OK, I don't, I don't care whether it's fully logical, logically consistent with Calvinism, this is at least tries to submit itself to the Bible. What the Bible actually teaches. So yeah, that's Amyraldism .

Shea Houdmann

If we were to go with the comments we've been receiving on on YouTube and various other things, several people have said why don't you talk about provisionism? Well, one provisionism is definitely the newest system. It's it was been developed in the last really couple of decades or maybe even the last decade. And to me, if we go through the points of Provisionism some people say it's basically Arminianism with eternal security. And you see that to a provisionist it's no, there's way more differences than that. But kind of so, Jeff, I I know you did some digging into this. What are the points of provisionism and how can they help us really understand this discussion, maybe from a slightly different perspective?

Jeff Laird

As far as I as far as I understand, the the biggest proponent of this is Leighton Flowers. And his representation that uses provide as an acronym. And his resources are probably obviously the most accurate way to get a fair representation of exactly what is meant by those. But in a nutshell the P,R,O,V,I,D,E would stand for people sin, so they're separated from God. We are responsible R, which means everyone can respond to God. That's because of, O, an open door where God gives a call that is enough that all people ought to respond to it. V is vicarious atonement, which means it's essentially the same thing, is unlimited atonement. That this sacrifice that Christ made was enough for everybody. I is illuminating grace. In other words,

God gives enough evidence of himself enough of his help overcoming our sin nature that everybody can and should respond. D is destroyed. Who basically says those who don't believe, or those who resist the Holy Spirit are the ones who are gonna find themselves on the wrong side of eternity. And then E is eternal security, which is for those of us who've been having this conversation sort of self-explanatory. So that's the way provisionism in at least the most popular sense is represented is with the PROVIDE acronym. It's. I would agree that it's it's sort of roughly Arminianism, not necessarily exactly the same thing. It's Arminianism sort of sets itself up almost as a direct counter to Calvinism. It was sort of conceived that way, and that's the way it's presented. Provisionism is not. It's definitely more modern language, so it's definitely an interesting take.

Kevin Stone

I ran across a a work that was put out by Doctor Eric Hankins, who's a pastor in the Southern Baptist Convention. And he is a big proponent of provisionism, which he calls Traditionalism. They kind of go back and forth with with some of these terms, trying to label it in a in a way that's going to be the most effective. But in this document that Hankins put out, he has a list of affirmations and denials to kind of clarify some of the issues. And I found this on free will to be quite illuminating. Under the free will section, Doctor Hankins wrote this, we affirm that God is an expression of his sovereignty, endows each person with actual free will, the ability to choose between two options which must be exercised in accepting or rejecting God's gracious call to salvation by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. And then he goes on to say this, we deny that the decision of faith is an act of God rather than a response of the person. We deny that there is an effectual call for certain people that is different from a general call to any person who hears and understands the gospel. So I appreciate that that clarity there. And and I would agree with a with a lot of what was said there.

Kevin Stone

Another thing that I like about provisionism is that they see that the word of God, which is the

sword of the spirit, has the power in itself. It has an inherent power to open people's eyes and to give them that ability to choose the gospel. So it's it's the the Holy Spirit uses his sword to to convict an unsaved person of sin, of righteousness, and of coming judgment. And uses that sword of the spirit, the word of God to cause that person to respond to the gospel. So God has his ways, but he but the free will of man is is still coming into play here.

Jeff Laird

I appreciate that you brought that info in because for me, I understand that sometimes you first shake if something is not the most accurate. So for me, when I look at provisionism, my gut tells me something that I'm pretty sure most provisionist would not support. Which to me is it sounds like it sort of inverts the concept of the gospel, and I don't mean that necessarily in a in a heretical way, but I read that presentation is saying that in a sense, all people are sort of on the path to becoming believers until they resist. You know, sort of it goes into that hole, you know that the thing that puts the person in hell is not believing in Jesus, which is not wrong. I understand John, for example, says, you know, they're condemned because they have not believed in the son of God. But I'm more comfortable with the presentation that says that everybody's on the path to destruction because that's our state until we are saved. I don't believe that that's some, you know, irreconcilable thing. It's just when you have your first encounter with it, you look at that, you go that's I think that's what that means. So I'd be curious to see how that's sort of explained or dealt with. Not that I think it would be extremely difficult, but I would be curious there. I do like what you said Kevin, that provisionism does seem to emphasize the idea that the gospel is what gives the power for it. It puts a strong emphasis on that. It's not, you know, fancy preaching and everything else like that, that God's word, as he said, is the thing that actually makes a difference. It's it's an interesting idea.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, with like a Romans 1:16 where I'm I'm not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power. Or Isaiah 55:11, where it says God's word when it goes out of from God's mouth always

accomplishes what he desires it to. So there's a power inherent in God's word. God's word is living and active sharper than any two edged sword. Provisionism, I I definitely like it better than Arminianism in the sense. At one point in my Christian life I would have characterized myself as a four point Armenian in the sense of eternal security being the one point that I disagree with on with Arminianism. I've grown back and forth. I've continued to study these issues. Continue to think through. And that's what I just guess this whole series that Kevin, Jeff and I been trying to communicate is that they're there's not only one way to see these things. It's not only just one biblically plausible explanation. And we have our preferences. We have different views on which we think is the best explanation. Which is the best harmonization of God's sovereignty with human responsibility and free will. Do we absolutely know this is the truth? Hopefully you're detecting a humble spirit in us that, while we have our preferences, we're not willing to die on any of these hills. That we think they're within the Orthodox Christian belief, there are multiple ways to look at this that are within the scope of this this is still teaching trusting in Jesus Christ by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, trusting that God is sovereign, that he has provided salvation, he also calls us to respond to the offer of salvation.

Shea Houdmann

So we'll include obviously links to the episode, episode 18, I believe it was where Jeff and I discussed Molinism in a much greater depth. We encourage you to study that. And we'll include links to where you can learn more about Amyraldism and also provisioning because all of these systems are definitely worth studying, comparing with Scripture, asking God for wisdom and then coming to the conclusion that He leads you through in the in the power and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. So. So, Jeff, Kevin, thank you for joining me throughout this eight episode series on what is Calvinism and what are the alternatives in the different ways, different conversations. It's it's been interesting and been a good refresher for me to dig into these issues some more. So again, this has been the episode on, I guess what are some of the other alternatives to

Calvinism and Arminianism? Got questions? The Bible has answers, and we'll help you find them.