

# Examining Calvinism

Monday, January 12, 2009  
**Middle Knowledge**



What is Middle Knowledge?

Middle knowledge entails God's knowledge of all hypothetical situations, all contingencies, that is, all of the what-ifs.

What do Calvinists believe about Middle Knowledge?

Calvinist, R.C. Sproul, writes: "God's omniscience refers to God's total knowledge of all things actual and potential. **God knows not only all that is, but everything that possibly could be.** The **expert chess player exemplifies a kind of omniscience**, though it is limited to the options of chess play. He knows that his opponent can make move A, B, C, or D, and so

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RICHARD  
COORDS

The purpose of this

forth. Each possible move opens up certain counter-moves. The more moves ahead the expert can consider, the more he can control his chess-game destiny. The more options and counter-options one considers, the more complex and difficult the reasoning. In reality no chess player is omniscient. **God knows not only all available options, but also which option will be exercised.** He knows the end from the beginning. God's omniscience excludes both ignorance and learning. If there is ignorance in the mind of God, then divine omniscience is a hollow, indeed fraudulent, phrase. Learning always presupposes a certain level of ignorance. One simply cannot learn what one already knows. There is no learning curve for God. Since no gaps exist in his knowledge, there is nothing for him to learn. For us to know what will happen tomorrow, we must guess concerning things that are contingent. If I say to a friend, 'What are you going to do tomorrow?' he might reply, 'That depends.' Those two words acknowledge that there are contingencies ahead and that what happens to us depends on these contingencies. It is said that **God knows all contingencies, but none of them contingently.** God never says to himself, 'That depends.' Nothing is contingent to him. He knows all things that will happen because he ordains everything that does happen. This is crucial to our understanding of God's omniscience. He does not know what will happen by virtue of exceedingly good guesswork about future events. He knows it with certainty because he has decreed it." (*What is Reformed Theology?*, pp.171-172)

examination is to embrace the Apostle Paul's words at 1st Thessalonians 5:21 which states: "Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good." How can a person examine without asking questions, and how can it be done "carefully" if one is already so committed to a certain course that all objectivity has long since died? If the Calvinist is truly examining carefully, shouldn't they be an expert in Arminianism? Similarly, if the Arminian is truly examining

**Question:** If God has Middle Knowledge, then why didn't He use it to save everyone, or to bring about His kingdom on earth, or to minimize sin?

Let's address this in 4 steps:

**1) Do Calvinists agree with Arminians that God possesses Middle Knowledge?**

Yes, based upon Sproul's quote. However, the Calvinist perspective is that God's Middle Knowledge is simply the logical result of an immutable decree, though nevertheless, both sides agree with the general concept of Middle Knowledge.

**2) Why doesn't God use His Middle Knowledge to limit sin?**

According to Calvinism, God limits sin, to only those sins which are aligned to the sovereign purpose of God. (As previously discussed, that eliminates Compatibilism, and leaves room only enough for Hard Determinism.) Arminians insist that God does not *ordain* sin, or create sin for a *purpose*, or create sin by *necessity*, but rather that God takes the sin of others and *uses* it for a purpose, which is a big difference between God creating the *fact* of sin. Arminians believe that God created the *fact of freedom*, rather than the *fact of sin*, and then God uses men's *freedom*, in order to initiate His own sovereign plans and desires.

**3) Why doesn't God use His Middle Knowledge to bring about the kingdom**

carefully, shouldn't he, too, be an expert in Calvinism? Many have claimed to have made exhaustive searches, when yet the reality is that they have made virtually no research at all. In many cases, a person will simply hear the particular philosophy he likes, in light of a few select verses, and then force all Scripture to submit to it, and then deem it "truth." Consider wise King Solomon's words at Proverbs 18:13: "He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him."

of God on earth?

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Arminians believe that God used His Middle Knowledge of what Israel would have freely done, and planned Calvary accordingly (see [Acts 2:23](#)). The opposing Calvinist view affirms that God knows all contingencies (i.e. Middle Knowledge), but never knows anything contingently, and that is a major distinctive. In other words, according to Calvinism, God's knowledge is not of what man would do, on his own, but what man would do, from the standpoint of what necessarily follows from a predetermined, all-encompassing, decree.

#### 4) Why doesn't God use His Middle Knowledge to save everyone?

I may disagree slightly with most Arminians on this point, because I believe that God could save anyone and everyone, by their own free choice, if God simply applied sufficient pressure. In other words, think of someone who is the most "lost" and "depraved" person that you know, and imagine if Jesus appeared to them, just as Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus along the road to Damascus, and spoke with him, and blinded him for three days. You have to imagine that no matter how much a person is depraved, absolutely no one is too depraved for God to be able to reach. That doesn't magnify man, but rather magnifies the ability of God to reach sinners, no matter how far off they may be. My understanding is that God does not give an *irresistible* grace, as per Calvinism, but rather that God gives a *sufficient* grace, that is, an enabling grace (i.e.

Prevenient Grace), where someone is placed in a situation where they “can” receive Him, all by the divine intervention of God. The reason why one embraces or rejects this grace, thus depends upon the individual, and it’s not a matter of man seeking God, but God seeking man, and forcing the decision upon man. Man is therefore “passive” in terms of whether grace comes to him, and is only “active” in terms of whether he accepts or rejects the matter set before him, and on that account, is held accountable by God. There is also a strain of Calvinism, though is not the norm, that God uses His Middle Knowledge to bring about the salvation of His “elect.” There is also a strain of Arminianism that teaches that God used His Middle Knowledge to choose to effectuate the world in which the “most” amount of people would end up getting saved. (I do not subscribe to this view, but am studying it more carefully. It was taught by William Lane Craig and Ken Keathley. You can find Keathley’s presentation [here](#). My next post will more fully address Keathley’s presentation on Molinism, in which he actually rejects both Calvinism and Arminianism.)

This issue was present in two prior Blogs:

<http://examiningcalvinism.blogspot.com/2008/07/molism.html>

<http://examiningcalvinism.blogspot.com/2008/06/rc-sproul-middle-knowledge.html>

*The next Blog post will address Molinism, as*

*taught by Ken Keathley.*

Posted by Richard Coords at [12:33 PM](#)

3 comments:

[Luke](#) said...

Richard,

In reading your post, my mind went in the direction of God's decrees. I've been working on this for some time and certainly am still not complete with what I offer but I would like to do so and see if it is another way of looking at the idea you are prodding with your post.

I see God as having two orders of decrees:

1. Inceptive Decree-God not only decrees, but the God also conceived of the idea.
2. Indulgent Decree-God decrees but man conceives of the idea.

I see this happening with Israel wanting a king for themselves like the rest of the nations. In relation to what I propose, God's choice of David as king would be Inceptive. The people's choice to have a king would be Indulgent. I propose I Samuel 16:12 and I Samuel 8:7-9 respectively as illustrations.

Be nice now, I'm still in my early stages with this.

[January 13, 2009 4:14 PM](#)

[Pastor Terry](#) said...

This was a great article - air and balanced. You get a big "Amen!" from me!

Be blessed,

Terry Michaels

'The preacher who hates religion and loves God'

<http://www.strategicbookpublishing.com/ThatIMayKnowYou.html>

January 13, 2009 5:55 PM

[Godismyjudge](#) said...

Dear Richard,

I enjoyed your post.

*I may disagree slightly with most Arminians on this point, because I believe that God could save anyone and everyone by their own free choice, if God simply applied sufficient pressure.*

Sometimes I think this, sometimes I don't.

*In other words, think of someone who is the most "lost" and "depraved" person that you know, and imagine if Jesus appeared to them, just as Jesus appeared to Saul...*

Right, but what about Judas or Satan. Presumably they had equivalent or greater revelation than Saul, yet they resisted.

God be with you,

Dan

January 13, 2009 7:42 PM

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