

A Just God

Logically speaking, to say that God is one is to say that God is impartial. That is, when we speak of God we must ignore parts. There are no parts involved in the issue. There are not two sides of the story. That is why all of the things the Bible has to say about God can be deduced from the one Bible statement, a just God (Isaiah 45:21).

Nehemiah 9:33. 'Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly.' In this prayer Nehemiah recognizes the justice of God even during difficult times. There is a tendency among some to suggest that God is the source of evil and good alike. The principle of justice denies that. Although it is possible to illuminate this principle philosophically, to do so would go beyond the Biblical text. The Bible answer to the question is that, insofar as God is concerned, 'we cannot find him out'.

Job 37:23. 'Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: he is excellent in power, and in judgement, and in plenty of justice: he will not afflict.' Here is perhaps the most complete expression of the justice of God in the Bible. Justice is placed in the context of God's power and judgement. These two working together may be perceived from a human point of view as affliction. We are warned that this perception is false, and we should beware of laying any particular thing to God's account, lest we set ourselves up in judgement of God.

Psalms 89:14. 'Justice and judgement are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.' Again judgement and sovereignty are associated with justice. This verse indicates, however, that mercy and truth are also essential to the configuration of justice as applied to human affairs.

It has become apparent that some things can be said about God since they are inherent to the logic of God's unity and justice. The attributes of power, judgement, mercy and truth have already appeared. The Bible refers to other things that can truthfully be said about God, especially from the human point of view.

Numbers 22:28. 'And the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?' It is peculiar that Christian interpreters

ignore a fundamental attribute of God, which is creation of speech.

Deuteronomy 32:4. `He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgement: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.' `Rock' is the concrete term referring to God as the perfect refuge. This is based in this text on the fact that his work is perfect, that is, complete in itself and not dependent on anything. This is stated to be possible because all his ways are judgement, that is, everything He does is based on His own judgement and is not contingent on anything else. There is therefore nothing that can weaken His capacity to be a refuge. The result of such independence is that God is perfectly true, since there is neither need nor contingent that can pressure Him to swerve from His perfect judgement.

Deuteronomy 33:27. `The eternal God is thy refuge.' Eternity does not refer to infinite time, but the fact that God is not bound by time and space at all. According to the creation story in Genesis 1, God created space and time. God's sovereignty over space and time permit Him to be the perfect refuge from all dangers that exist in time and space. 1 Chronicles 29:11-12. 'Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all.'

Job 36:26. `Behold, God is great, and we know him not, neither can the number of his years be searched out.'

Psalm 90:2. `Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.' Not only is God eternal, but He is uniquely eternal. He is the only One who is not bound by time and space. Not only did He create all things, but He is God independently of all things. He does not need anything to establish His divinity by comparison. He is good without the evil which defines good relatively, He is Creator even without creation to prove His creatorship, He is without any `is not' to support His existence.

Psalm 93:2. 'Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting.' Eternity logically gives rise to sovereignty. Note Deuteronomy 33:27.

Isaiah 40:28. `Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.' The logical succession here is eternity, sovereignty, creatorship, omnipotence, and omniscience. Eternity or being unbounded by time and space suggests sovereignty. Sovereignty suggests the capacity to create. Creating suggests complete power over what is created and perfect knowledge of it.

Isaiah 57:15*. `Thus said the high and lofty one that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.' The exaltedness of God is referred before eternity,

thus showing that it is not a relative but an absolute exaltedness. God is not to be compared to another. On the other side of eternity comes the attribute of holiness. Holiness, that is, separation or otherness, cannot be considered relative either, since the absoluteness of God's attributes is already established in the beginning of the verse. The last half of the verse expresses the divine penetration into the human world. The complete separateness of God might suggest that the human world can have no contact with divinity. This logical conclusion must be denied, however, since it would limit God. As exalted sovereign, eternal and holy or separate, God can choose to deal with the human world. He is not limited by it. God's penetration into the created world is always divine, that is sovereign and independent. Therefore, such penetration does not imply the possibility of incarnation, which by definition is subservient and dependent, subject to the limitations of time and space.

Jeremiah 10:6. 'Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O Lord; thou art great, and thy name is great in might.' The term 'great' is used here in the absolute sense. The text states that there is none to be compared with God. No standard of measurement can be applied to God. There is therefore no associate or compound with God.

Jeremiah 10:10. 'But the Lord is the true God, he is the living God, and an everlasting king.' To be truly God implies that such God is living and always sovereign. As such, the idea that death can be attached to God is inconsistent and therefore invalid.

Habakkuk 1:12. 'Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One?'

Luke 19:40. 'And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.' Here Jesus recognizes the attribute of God which is creation of speech.

Romans 16:26. 'The everlasting God.'

1 Timothy 1:17. 'Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever.' Within one sentence Paul states the attributes of sovereignty, eternity, immortality, invisibility, and omniscience.

James 1:17. 'Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.' This text states that God is unchanging. It implies at the same time that there is no compound or association with God, nor any qualities additional.

These texts are only representative of hundreds more in the Bible expressing the inherent divine attributes. We can affirm these attributes without breaking the commandment 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image' because they are overtly expressed in the Bible itself. On the basis of these texts we can say that God is eternal, almighty, all-knowing, ever-perceiving, ever-living, all-independent in will and action, creator of speech, and ever-trueful. We can affirm that God is never a compound,

accommodation, incarnation, association, nor is He visible or changing, nor does He have need or qualities that may be separated, added or subtracted. But all of these things are logically deducible from His unity and justice. At this point I have reached what is sufficient in expressing the Bible faith in regard to what God is like. I conclude in brief, that a large segment of the Bible is there to show that God is just.

We can summarize the everlasting Gospel to this point: 1) God is One and there is no other God but He. 2) The one true God is inherently just, and all of his actions and attributes are consistent with His perfect justice.

We have noted that the Bible declares God to be just. The problem of justice is more complex than that, however. The metaphysical dilemma is how to reconcile the absolute sovereignty of God with the clear fact that the God of Scripture and revelation firmly calls human beings to account for their behavior.

If God is truly sovereign, does that not mean that all things are determined by His will? If all things are determined by God's will, how then can God hold people accountable for what they do? There are texts in both the Bible and Qur'an which seem to affirm either God's absolute sovereignty or determinism on one hand, and human accountability and free will on the other. If it has become apparent that a proof text method is not sufficient for resolving the issue of God's unity or trinity, it is even more apparent that a simple proof text method will tell us even less about this knotty problem.

The debate between Pelagius and Augustine, and between predestination and Arminianism, in Christianity, seems to have parallels in Islamic history as well. Sunni theology tends to opt for sovereignty. There is an attitude of awe before the decree of God which seems, from the human viewpoint, only to gain from its arbitrary character. By contrast, Shiite theology tends to reconcile sovereignty and free will in a middle ground. In brief, actual events are conceived to consist of various aspects, all of which are created by a sovereign God. The whole configuration is within the sovereignty of God, but one of the many contributing factors in any event may be free will.

The middle way between determinism and free will is not merely a means of reconciling texts which seem to conflict. It is a real attempt to deal with the metaphysical issues involved in both human suffering and human responsibility. Nevertheless, I have chosen one text to illustrate the problem. In 2 Samuel 24:1 we have a text which has been used by Ahmed Deedat to illustrate the corruption of the Bible, which is the conclusion he draws from the conflict with 1 Chronicles 21:1.

‘And again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.’

1 Samuel 24:1. ‘And Satan stood up against Israel and provoked David to number Israel.’ 1 Chronicles 21:1.

The conflict between the two texts is in the matter of who moved David to number Israel, the Lord or Satan. The facile Christian solution appears inadequate. It would have the ‘he’ of 1 Samuel 24:1 refer

not to the natural antecedent (the Lord), but an unmentioned antecedent (Satan). The most natural solution is to accept that one text states the Lord to have moved David and the other Satan.

An explanation following the midway between determinism and free will would be as follows. This event includes many contributing aspects, among which are divine sovereignty, the action of Satan, and the exercise of will or choice on the part of David. It is the configuration of these aspects, along with other contributing factors, which produced the event. One aspect, divine sovereignty, is mentioned in 1 Samuel 24:1. Another aspect, Satanic temptation, is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 21:1. Both versions note the responsibility of David.

Since all three aspects are present in the text, the best interpretation is one which includes all of them. Ahmed Deedat's suggestion that the conflict between sovereignty and Satanic action in the Bible implies a corrupt text is not only weak from a scholarly point of view, but could be turned back against the Qur'an itself, God forbid.

In conclusion, we may say that the Bible definitely states that God is just. How the Justice of God fits into the working of divine sovereignty and human free will is a subject requiring metaphysical speculation. The middle way, however, between determinism and free will provides a method for reconciling the seeming conflicts in both the Bible and the holy Qur'an.

Source URL: <https://www.al-islam.org/islam-in-the-bible-thomas-mcelwain/just-god>