

Ministry of Justice

Can we trust God's Justice?

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Psalm 99:4

“The King is mighty, he loves justice - you have established equity; in Jacob you have done what is just and right”

Can we trust God's Justice?

Deuteronomy 32:3-4

Ascribe greatness to our God, the Rock

His work is perfect and all His ways are just ;

a God of faithfulness without injustice good

and upright is He

Can we trust God's Justice?

A. Is God's justice intrinsic to His nature?

B. What are the theological implications of God's justice?

C. What are the practical implications of God's justice?

Can we trust God's Justice?

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

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- The weight of injustice
- Theology in the shadow of the cross
- Was the cross necessary? If so why?

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

John Owen

“The Death of Death in the Death of Christ” (1647)

- The cross was *“suitable but not necessary”*
- Hypothetical necessity
- It is necessary because God wills it
- It is not necessary because of His nature

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

“The foundation of this whole assertion seems to me to be false and erroneous, namely, that God could not have mercy on mankind unless satisfaction were made by his Son...to assert positively that absolutely and antecedently to his constitution he could not have done it, is to me an unwritten tradition, the Scripture affirming no such thing, neither can it be gathered from thence in any good consequence.”

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A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

- Athanasius, Augustine, Aquinas
- Calvin
- Twisse, Rutherford
- The Westminster Confession
 - “requisite” – not “necessary”*

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

Calvin on John 15:13

“God could have redeemed us by a word or a wish, save that another way seemed to him best for our sakes: that by not sparing His own and only-begotten Son, he might testify in His person how much he cares for our salvation. And those hearts must be harder than iron or stone which are not softened by the incomparable sweetness of the divine love.”

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Arthur Pink

*“And it is a question of vast importance if we are to have **right conceptions of the absolute independence of God.***

*But to insist that a regime wherein sin must be punished, or that He was limited to the appointing of a Substitute unto Death if the guilty were to go free—**strikes this writer as little short of blasphemy.***

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

Why?

1. The primary issue is that of God's freedom – a Pelagian view of God's freedom

“Our God is in heaven and he does whatever pleases him” (Psalm 115:3)

2. We cannot know God's essence – what He is in Himself

Essential/Intrinsic justice



Legislative/Declarative justice



Distributive justice
(Remunerative & Retributive)

Essential Intrinsic justice



Legislative/Declarative justice



Distributive justice
(Remunerative & Retributive)

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

What do you think?

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

John Owen

“Dissertation on Divine Justice” (1652)

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

“The justice of God, absolutely considered, is the universal rectitude and perfection of the divine nature; for such is the divine nature antecedent to all acts of his will and suppositions of objects towards which it might operate.”

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Essential/Intrinsic justice



Legislative/Declarative justice



Distributive justice
(Remunerative & Retributive)

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

- God was free to decide to save or not to save
- God has freedom in:
 - ✓ The mode
 - ✓ The timing
 - ✓ The degree of punishment

“But without satisfaction God could not pardon sin consistently with his nature, justice and truth”

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

Evidence

1) God's "great detestation and immortal hatred" of sin

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

Habakkuk 1:13

*Your eyes are too pure to look on evil;
you cannot tolerate wrongdoing.*

Why then do you tolerate the treacherous?

*Why are you silent while the wicked swallow
up those more righteous than themselves?*

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

Psalm 5:4-5

For you are not a God who is pleased with wickedness;

with you, evil people are not welcome.

The arrogant cannot stand in your presence.

You hate all who do wrong.

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

“Sin is the dare of God’s justice, the rape of His mercy, the jeer of His patience, the slight of His power, the contempt of His love! It is the fist that strikes the face of Christ”

John Bunyan

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

2) God is portrayed as the Judge

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

Gen 18:23,25

“Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?

Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike.

Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

Romans 3:5-6

But if our unrighteousness brings out God's righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.)

Certainly not! If that were so, how could God judge the world?

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

Acts 17:31

For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.'

A. Is God's justice intrinsic to His nature?

3) God's punishment of sin flows from His nature

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

Revelation 6:15-17

Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains.

They called to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!

For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?'

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

4) Conscience and providence

- Evidenced in Scripture and human experience

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

5) The revelation of the cross

“There are some attributes of his nature the knowledge of which could not reach the ears of sinners but by Christ...”

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

5) The revelation of the cross

“He withdrew about a stone’s throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.”

Luke 23:41-44

Jonathan Edwards on Gethsemane

*The agony was caused by a vivid, bright, full, immediate view of the wrath of God. The Father, as it were, set the cup down before him... **he now had a near view of that furnace into which he was about to be cast. He stood and viewed its raging flames and the glowing of its heat,** that he might know where he was going and what he was about to suffer.*

Stricken, Smitten and Afflicted

Tell me, ye who hear him groaning

Was there ever grief like his?

Friends thro' fear his cause disowning

Foes insulting his distress

Many hands were raised to wound him

None would interpose to save

Yet the deepest stroke that pierced him

Was the stroke that Justice gave

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

Why did Owen change his mind

- Defence of penal substitutionary atonement against the Socinians
- Further engagement with Scripture
- Confidence that we can know God

Essential/Intrinsic justice



Legislative/Declarative justice



Distributive justice
(Remunerative & Retributive)

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

- God is incomprehensible yet knowable
- God is absolute yet personal
- Our knowledge is analogical
- Knowing God is the pinnacle of human privilege
- To know God better we must walk in His ways

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

1. God's Freedom

- There are things which God cannot do
- God can do everything He wants to do
- We are not limiting His freedom
- Restrictions do not limit – they liberate
- He is the yardstick of justice
- He cannot be tempted to injustice

A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

2. God's simplicity

- God is not a collection of abstract qualities
- All His attributes are essential
- None of the attributes are accidental to God
- We cannot rank His attributes
- God is in perfect harmony with Himself
- *“God is just all the way through”*





Justice

Wisdom

Grace

Love



A. Is God' justice intrinsic to His nature?

God acts according to a perfect internal standard of right and wrong. All his actions are within the limits of this standard. It is the form and structure of His goodness.”

John Frame

Questions

Can we trust God's Justice?

A. Is God's justice intrinsic to His nature?

B. What are the theological implications of God's justice?

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1. We can love God truly

2. We can trust God's totally

3. We can hope in God confidently

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B. What are the theological implications of God's justice?

C. What are the practical implications of God's justice?

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1. How can the truth of divine justice be of use in these pastoral situations?

C. What are the practical implications of God's justice?

Scenario 1: *Melanie is a recent convert and comes from a large Catholic family. Her beloved grandmother is dying, and Melanie is very distressed. She asks you, "what is going to happen to Nana? If she won't go to heaven, how can I tell my family? And how can I keep on loving God"*

C. What are the practical implications of God's justice?

- ***Scenario 2:*** *Jordan is an older single man in your congregation. He struggles with depression, and you know that when this is particularly bad, he doubts his salvation. Recently, he has withdrawn from church entirely, as he says that he committed a certain sin in his youth which means he can't be forgiven.*

C. What are the practical implications of God's justice?

2. How can the truth of God's justice be discussed in these conversations?

C. What are the practical implications of God's justice?

- ***Scenario 1:*** *A church member has brought a colleague, Imogen, along to Christianity Explored. Imogen has been brought up in a liberal tradition, and when she hears about penal substitution, she is shocked. She asks, "Why would a good God punish his son like this? Surely, if he's God, he can do anything he wants. He could just forgive us all – that's what I'd do!"*

C. What are the practical implications of God's justice?

Scenario 2: *You are doing some cold contact evangelism and get into conversation with a recent arrival in the UK. He says to you, "I used to believe in God, but now I look at the suffering in my country and I think that there can't be a God. I was taught that the good would be rewarded, and the bad would be punished, but all I see is the bad people persecuting the good. No God would allow that."*

A. Is God's justice intrinsic to His nature?

Heidelberg Catechism

- ***Q 40. Why did Christ have to go all the way to death?***
- ***A. Because God's justice and truth demand it - only the death of God's Son could pay for our sin***