

“How Can God Be Just?”
Sam Storms November 6, 2006

<http://www.enjoyinggodministries.com/article/how-can-god-be-just>

One of the more frequently heard objections to unconditional election is that it impugns God’s justice. God is unfair and unjust, says the Arminian, if he treats people differently or bestows on some a favor that he withholds from others.

But this is surely a strange way of defining justice. Justice is that principle in virtue of which a person is given his due. To withhold from a person what he deserves or what the law demands that he receive is to act unjustly. How, then, can it be unjust to withhold from a person what he does *not* deserve? If you are in my debt and I demand payment, I can hardly be said to have acted unjustly. Similarly, should you not pay me, as you are obligated by law, it is justice that demands that you suffer the consequences.

All humanity stands infinitely indebted to God, rightly condemned to suffer the penal consequences that our sin deserves. No man can rightfully claim to deserve mercy or divine clemency, for “there is none who does good, there is not even one” (Rom. 3:12b). The verdict of Holy Scripture is “guilty as charged,” with no grounds for a new trial or for appeal.

No legitimate indictment may be brought against the bench should “His Honor” immediately consign the whole of Adam’s race to eternal death. There is justifiable recourse for the defendants neither in the law nor in themselves. No technicality in the procedural development of the trial nor character witness on behalf of the accursed can be claimed. Unlike earthly judges who may be baffled by quick-witted lawyers or bribed by unscrupulous partisans, God weighs all the evidence and judges with absolute impartiality. The verdict is the same for all: *Guilty!* The punishment is the same for all: *Eternal Death!*

God is under no obligation to save any, and is entirely just in condemning all. That he should pardon some is owing entirely to free and sovereign grace. Thus, “the marvel of marvels,” says Benjamin Warfield, “is not that God, in his infinite love, has not elected all of this guilty race to be saved, but that he has elected any. What really needs accounting for – though to

account for it passes the powers of our extremest flights of imagination – is how the holy God could get the consent of his nature to save a single sinner. If we know what sin is, and what holiness is, and what salvation from sin to holiness is, this is what we shall face” (Benjamin B. Warfield, “Election,” in *Selected Shorter Writings*, ed. John E. Meeter, 2 vols. [Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970], 1:297-98).

I must confess that the question that haunts my heart is not “How can God be just?”, but “How can God be merciful?” It isn’t “Esau I hated” that disturbs me, but “Jacob I loved” that absolutely astounds me.

How Can God Be Impartial?

Somewhat related to the foregoing objection concerning God’s justice is the one which accuses him of partiality. God is not impartial, say many Arminians, if he favors some with life but not all. He is guilty of showing partiality toward the elect.

Of course he is! That is what unconditional election is all about. But we should refrain from saying that God is “guilty” of being partial toward the elect because this kind of partiality is a virtue, not a vice. It is a divine prerogative for which God should be praised, not vilified. Let me explain what I mean.

To say that God is impartial means that he is not moved or motivated by human characteristics such as race or gender or color of hair or socio-economic achievements. When God set his electing love on some but not all, he was not influenced by wealth or power or beauty or education or skill or potential or any other human consideration. God favored the elect, God was *partial* toward them, because that is what he wanted to do. He was not obligated by anything in any person to show favor to anyone. If God grants preferential treatment to his elect it is solely because it pleases him to do so, and not because the elect distinguished themselves from the non-elect by fulfilling some condition, either spiritual or physical.

Scripture makes it ever so clear that there is nothing that makes one person to differ from another in the eyes of God. In every morally and spiritually relevant concern, all people are equal. No person in any morally or spiritually relevant way stands out as different from any other person, or manifests any feature or performs any deed or fulfills any condition that God is obligated to acknowledge or to which he must respond. In that sense, therefore, he is utterly *impartial* when he chooses one but not

another. The basis for this choice is not because of some distinctive element in the former that the latter lacks. No physical trait or spiritual virtue (or vice, for that matter), no financial or political achievement, nothing, dictates or determines God's election of men and women to eternal life. This is just another way of saying that election is utterly of *grace*.

What is it, then, that dictates and determines God's choice? *God*. He chooses one, but not another, because it pleases him to do so. **Why that particular choice is more pleasing to God than another, or neither, is not revealed in Holy Scripture.** That is simply the way God wants it, and so it shall be.

I've heard people say: "But I don't agree with or care for God's reason in choosing Jerry instead of Ed." But what, may I ask, is that reason, the one of which you disapprove? I am not aware that Scripture provides such information. How can anyone object to the reason God elected Jerry instead of Ed when no one knows what it is?

I can tell you what that reason *is not*. It is not anything having to do with Jerry or Ed, either foreseen or actual. God chose Jerry instead of Ed because it was pleasing to God, and that is all the reason he needs. This is the heart and soul of the doctrine of unconditional election, that God sovereignly decided to show love and favor toward some who did not deserve it, but not all, without regard to anything in either.

To sum up, God is *partial toward the elect*, but not because of the elect. He favors them with love and life, without regard for their life or love. He is, therefore, *utterly impartial in the partiality he has for his own*. This is just another way of saying that God unconditionally (impartially) loves (is partial toward) the elect.