



It's Okay Not to Know God's Plan

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It is okay not to know why God does what He does. In fact, it is not our business. Our business is to know what God asks us to do, and then to do it. How do we know what God wants us to do? Certainly not by figuring out why He does what He does, and then calculating from that baseless speculation. God has sent His Messenger and His Message to convey to us in clear terms what to do. For example, He has said that we will be questioned, but He will not (Qur'an 21:23). Thus, we can understand that we should act under the awareness that we will be questioned, and should not expect from God an account of what He does. Then of course, do not pretend as if God has informed us of why He does what He does.

For instance, do not claim that God has sent the pandemic (or the earthquake, or the tsunami, etc.) to punish such and such people for such and such sin. For this is not something we know. Indeed, Allah says “And whatever strikes you of disaster, it is for what your hands have earned—but He pardons much” (Qur'an 42:30). This, however, does not warrant me to think I know what is truly a disaster and what is a blessing. What I think is a disaster among the acts of God may actually be a blessing, and vice versa. In the final analysis this depends on what it means for my final destination in the Hereafter, and after God's Mercy, whether I respond with submission and patience or with sin and rebellion. Submission is a blessing and sin is the disaster. Observing the worldly fortunes, which we deem ‘good’ or ‘bad,’ is not the way to know what are the sins and who are the sinners. Notice that people who talk this way display their lack of principles and consistency. For when a disaster strikes them, they usually say it is because God tests the righteous. That is not having a good opinion of God, but just a good opinion of one's self and a bad opinion of others. Gratefulness, and *not* wealth, is the sign of God's favor. Impatience, and *not* worldly misfortune, is the sign of God's disfavor. May Allah test our gratefulness and not our patience.

Whenever we think we know why God does what He does, we are only putting our own desires and delusions in the empty space of our ignorance. We are putting our ego in the place of God. It is just as wrong if you think God is punishing you. Who are you to decide how God should deal with your sins? Do not try to do God's job. Do your own job. Try to be just, even when it is against yourself. Be merciful to all, including yourself. Yet we will never be as just and merciful as The Just and

The Merciful, so we are better off to leave His job to Him. Once you lay aside the need to know why God does what He does, you will relieve yourself of many unnecessary burdens on your faith, which can lead to unbelief. If your faith in God is conditional on your being able to explain His actions, your inability to meet that condition will undermine your faith.

The pandemic has amplified certain theological pseudo-problems in the public sphere of our internet-connected world. They seem to be traps laid by Satan. On another level, they are acts of God, just as the pandemic; the fact that the sun rises every morning, and that the universe operates according to a fixed order, are all acts of God. For nothing escapes God's plan, including Satan's plots. I do not know what role Satan plays in God's plan, but I do not need to know. Thus, I am relieved of this impossible burden. God, however, has informed us that Satan's plan is to lead us away from Him, and has told us what we need to know and do to avoid that (Qur'an 36:60–61).

God is in control, but not at your service

The specific satanic trap I have in mind was usually hushed under the 'polite' skeptical silence about God that used to pervade our 'secular' liberal culture. Now, it emerges loudly in the conflict between two misguided factions. One faction is a group of religious charlatans and lunatics who profit by making claims about why God does what He does. The problem is not just the reason they think God has. It is simply their claim to know *why*. What they attribute to God is, of course, revealing of their own motives. One of their leaders, some years ago, claimed that God sent an earthquake to Haiti to punish Haitians because their ancestors revolted against their white slave drivers. The nature of the 'god' he claims to speak for is clear.

On the other hand, a well-known 'secular' politician recently decided to weigh in on theology in an uncharacteristically explicit way. God did not bring the numbers of coronavirus infections down, he announced. Only the efforts of his government did so. This of course is a declaration of atheism. The fact is that God brings the numbers down, and when they go up it is God Who brings them up (Qur'an 4:78). We know this, and we know that regardless of this, we should make every just

effort that we have reasonable grounds for believing will lead to good, which in this case is to prevent the spread of disease.

Furthermore, we are able to have reasonable, scientific grounds for calculating what measures will bring about the good, precisely because God in His Mercy and Wisdom directs the course of nature according to an order. This order is constant, and thus to an extent discoverable by science. It is also so vast and complex that our knowledge of it can never be complete or infallible. Apparently, it is just enough in our grasp to enable us to act reasonably (if not perfectly), and yet just enough beyond us that our utter dependence on Him is evident to the reasonable. How unreasonable, then, to deny God's role in the number of coronavirus infections, or anything else.

Yet this madness gets the appearance of sanity in juxtaposition to the cacophony of phony claims by 'religious' people about why God does this or that; claims that are always transparent expressions of the myopic desires of deluded and arrogant people. Yet even for the reasonable believer, it is possible to fall into the trap of thinking that their faith in God's providence and governance of all affairs is not justified unless they can give an account of why God does what He does. So when disaster strikes, Satan demands, through the voices of an apparent legion of atheists: where is your God now? Why did He not cure you? Why did He not protect you?

Don't gamble with the devil over your faith

This is quite a reasonable challenge posed to the one who presumes to know the plan of their 'god,' and why their 'god' does this or allows that, and that their 'god' is on their side. Of course, such people are always on their own 'side' (or think they are). They always think that what they want to be is what should be. Yet all this has nothing to do with God. Asking from, hoping for, and depending on God is not the same as presuming He is on your side. Why should God be on my side rather than the other side? Why should God want me to get the job rather than the other guy with kids to feed? Why should He prefer my football team over the other?

If it's a matter of justice, then what if I am in the wrong? God is Just and hears the prayer of the oppressed. Should I seek out oppression so that He will be on 'my side'? Justice does not take 'sides.' When it comes to God, the question is not whether He is on my side, for there is just no sense debating over whose side God is on. The question is only whether I am truly on my own side (in relation to the Truth), or whether I only think I am on my own side (by making a 'god' of my own ego).

Those who keep that clear will not gamble with Satan over their faith. For when God turns out not to bring things about in the way someone decrees their 'god' will, it is not God Who is refuted, but only that person's own 'god.' Thus, in a sense, these atheist arguments are only relevant to a certain kind of hidden *shirk*. In that case, God may be sending a message through the atheist, to correct a false understanding of Him. Only God knows, not me. Many seem to become atheists by rejecting a childish idol they once mistook for God.

The final judgment is God's, and we are all in a process of growing and clarifying our relationship to God. That is a constant struggle of pushing back against my ego in disguise—trying to deceive me into taking it as my 'god'—when it tries to get in between God and me. Even as I am writing this, it is there. At this moment it seems to me important to remember that everything that happens is God's will, but that I do not know why He does what He does, and that is okay. May He forgive us, have mercy on us, and give us the best in this life and the Hereafter.