

The Compatibility of Divine Mercy with Divine Punishment

Abstract

Presenter (Dr. Asadaf): Our question is how we can reconcile the concept of God's immense mercy with His severe punishment. At first glance, does this not appear to be a contradiction? On one side, there is the grandeur and vastness of divine mercy, and on the other, the intensity and permanence of divine punishment. Our brief answer is that mercy is indeed compatible with punishment; however, we question the duration, severity, and scope of punishment. Mysticism offers a different perspective, arguing that eternal punishment does not exist, but that people may become accustomed to it in hell. Ibn Arabi, who opposes the idea of eternal punishment, suggests that the damned are purified in their sleep-like state. Thus, while punishment is a principle to consider, given the aforementioned premises and arguments, it cannot be eternal or of such extensive and intense scope.

First Critic (Hujjat-ul-Islam Dr. Gorjian): The mystical discussion you referenced involves the concept of divine names and their governance. Some names have authority over others, with the name "Allah" being the supreme one. In previous writings, you mentioned that divine mercy surpasses all names, but this is not entirely accurate. Mercy is under the dominion of the name "Allah." This does not mean that if a name of majesty is invoked, it contradicts mercy; as the saying goes, "the last remedy is the stick." Thus, the existence of punishment does not necessarily conflict with divine mercy. Another point is the concept of the compatibility of names. You assume that mercy and wrath are incompatible. However, mercy is a higher and governing attribute, and wrath is a part of this governance. For instance, Amir al-Mu'minin, as a compassionate ruler, issues punishments at times. The comprehensive name includes both mercy and wrath, and both can coexist in different contexts. If wrath occurs, is it problematic? Therefore, wrath can be part of divine mercy. I sense a pluralistic assumption in your approach, and it seems to reflect a pluralistic view of salvation. Regarding verse 85 of Surah Al-Imran, if individuals before the advent of Islam adhered to their own religions, that is one thing. However, if we claim that all religions are valid even after the advent of Islam, it questions the very purpose of the final Prophet and the significance of Islam. In creating coexistence with other religions, it does not mean setting aside Islamic principles and Quranic teachings. Arguments should be presented with scientific rigor rather than ignoring parts of the religion.

Second Critic (Hujjat al-Islam Dr. Da'i-Najad): The historical context of the issue is important as it defines the novelty of the research. However, the historical background of this discussion was not thoroughly reviewed. While punishment is necessary, it must be proportionate, which falls under the attribute of divine justice and is not the focus here. If proportionate punishment is considered because it must be less than mercy, what about the principles of Sharia and the occurrence of punishments? If the intention is to address those who do not believe in the precedence of mercy over wrath, this is not a new discussion and has been previously explored. If the discussion based on Ibn Arabi's views is that fulfilling divine promises and threats is not obligatory, then what is stated in Sharia, including the issue of punishment, will be exactly and precisely implemented in the hereafter. The argument that the purpose of punishments is preventive and should be minimized to please some is incorrect. What is stated in the religion reflects the complete and appropriate relation between divine mercy and punishment. It is true that divine mercy is extensive and absolute, but one cannot consider this

absoluteness without limits. For example, divine power cannot be said to involve creating contradictory situations, as it does not align with the principle.

Session Chair (Hujjat-ul-Islam Dr. Qiyumi): In summarizing the discussion and addressing some of the critiques, it was noted that the paper did not fully engage with the verses related to punishment.