235026 - The one who disbelieves in Allah will abide in the fire of hell forever

the question

Everything in Islam is perfect, because it is from Allah, may He be exalted, and there is no dispute about the justice of Allah. But I once heard a disbeliever talking about the issue of abiding forever in hell, which made me wonder about this issue. He said that abiding forever in hell is unjust, because how could they be punished for eternity for some wrongdoing that is limited in nature and is not eternal, namely disbelief in this world? The Muslims respond to such specious arguments by saying that they are the ones who chose disbelief for themselves. Then the disbelievers respond by saying: we did not choose anything at all; rather we found ourselves in this state, and we do not even know about anything called hell. How should we respond to their specious argument about this matter? In fact, it is a matter that I think about a great deal, although I believe with certainty that Allah does not wrong people at all. I hope that you can explain and clarify.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

We have previously responded to this specious argument on our website. It is the sophistry of those heretics who do not believe in the hereafter, and do not believe in the reckoning or the punishment at all, and they do not believe in the resurrection and the Day of Judgement, as Shaykh ash-Shinqiti (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

As for the sophistry of those heretics who do not believe in the hereafter, which Ibn al-Qayyim mentioned in his detailed answer, Allah, may He be exalted, responded to it in the Quran. It is He Who knows how that which does not exist would be if it did exist, and He knew from eternity that

evil is deeply rooted in the nature of these evil people, to the extent that even if they were punished for a limited time equal to the time for which they disobeyed Allah, then returned to this world, they would go back to their evil, which would make further punishment inevitable, for they cannot do otherwise. Allah, may He be exalted, says in Surat al-An`am (interpretation of the meaning):

{If you could but see when they are made to stand before the Fire and will say, “Oh, would that we could be returned [to life on earth] and not deny the signs of our Lord and be among the believers.”

But what they concealed before has [now] appeared to them. And even if they were returned, they would return to that which they were forbidden; and indeed, they are liars} [al-An`am 6:27-28].

Secondly:

It is well known that Allah, may He be exalted, has created man to worship Him, may He be glorified and exalted, and He has created everything for man. So it is not appropriate for man to be distracted by what was created for him from the purpose for which he was created. Allah, may He be exalted, says:

{ And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me } [adh-Dhariyat 51:56].

The mission of man and the purpose for which he exists is to worship Allah, may He be glorified and exalted. So if a person allows himself to be distracted from that, he deserves punishment.

Allah sent prophets and messengers to humanity to explain to them the path of guidance:

{[We sent] messengers as bringers of good tidings and warners so that mankind will have no argument against Allah after the messengers. And ever is Allah Exalted in Might and Wise} [an-Nisa’ 4:165].

He told them on the lips of His Messengers that whoever deviates from His path and ascribes partners to his Lord, his punishment will be hell, to abide therein forever, and he will have no

share in the paradise of the Lord of the Worlds:

{Indeed, he who associates others with Allah - Allah has forbidden him Paradise, and his abode will be the Fire. And there are not for the wrongdoers any helpers} [al-Ma'idah 5:72].

He has told us that the doer of good and the doer of evil are not equal; rather this comes under the heading of thinking ill of Allah and His Wisdom:

{Should We equate those who believe and do righteous deeds with those who spread mischief in the land? Or should We equate those who fear Allah with the wicked?} [Sad 38:28]

{And not equal are the blind and the seeing, nor are those who believe and do righteous deeds and the evildoer. Little do you remember} [Ghafir 40:58].

And He has told us that on the Day of Resurrection, He will single out for His mercy those who believed in Him and believed His Messengers:

{[Allah] said, My punishment - I afflict with it whom I will, but My mercy encompasses all things. So I will decree it [especially] for those who fear Me and give zakah and those who believe in Our verses,

Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered prophet, whom they find written in what they have of the Torah and the Gospel, who enjoins upon them what is right and forbids them what is wrong and makes lawful for them the good things and prohibits for them the evil and relieves them of their burden and the shackles which were upon them. So they who have believed in him, honored him, supported him and followed the light which was sent down with him - it is those who will be the successful} [al-A`raf 7:156-157].

In *Sahih Muslim*, 2752, it is narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Allah has one hundred parts of mercy, of which He sent one part down among jinn, humans, animals and insects, because of which they show compassion and mercy to one another, and a wild animal shows compassion to its young. And Allah has kept back ninety-nine parts of mercy by which He will show mercy to His slaves on

the Day of Resurrection.”

After that, whoever disbelieves has disbelieved after having seen clear signs, and he has chosen for himself that fate which Allah has made inevitable for the disbelievers. Allah, may He be exalted, has shown him the two paths, so whoever wishes, let him believe, and whoever wishes, let him disbelieve, for he has chosen disbelief for himself with full awareness of his choice, and he knows where his deeds will take him. So what injustice can there be for such a person, who returns to his Lord having stubbornly disobeyed Him all his life? Even if he lived as long as Iblis, he would not give up his disbelief and stubbornness; rather he would persist in that until the end of time, just like the leader of the evildoers, the accursed Iblis.

Thirdly:

As for the specious argument which says that the disbelievers found themselves in this situation, it may be said regarding that:

The person who finds himself in a state of poverty would not accept this argument for himself – rather he would strive to acquire the blessings and bounty of this world so that he can change his situation.

And the one who finds himself in a state of sickness would strive to seek treatment so that he can regain his health.

This is how the wise person should be: if he finds himself in a situation of misguidance, he must strive to take himself out of the darkness and into the light. He must seek out sources of guidance and the path to paradise, otherwise this is the argument of the disbelievers of all nations:

{And when it is said to them: Come to the Revelation that Allah has sent down, and to the Messenger, they say: Sufficient for us is what we found our forefathers following. [Would they do that] even though their forefathers did not know anything and were not guided?} [al-Ma’idah 5:104].

And Allah, may He exalted, says:

{Or have We given them a book before this to which they are holding fast?

In fact they say: We found our forefathers following a certain path, and we are following in their footsteps.

Likewise, We never sent any warner before you to a city but its affluent ones said: We found our forefathers following a certain path, and we are following in their footsteps.

[The warner] said: Even if I bring you better guidance than that which you found your forefathers following? They said: Verily, we disbelieve in that with which you have been sent.

So We exacted retribution upon them; so see what was the fate of those who disbelieved} [az-Zukhruf 43:21-25].

In that case, if the message of the Messenger reaches a person in a way that constitutes proof against him, then he has no excuse before Allah, and he has no argument after that. Rather what he must do is follow guidance, no matter what his religion was before that:

{[We sent] messengers as bringers of good tidings and warners so that mankind will have no argument against Allah after the messengers. And ever is Allah Exalted in Might and Wise} [an-Nisa' 4:165]

{Whoever is guided is only guided for [the benefit of] his soul. And whoever errs only errs against it. And no bearer of burdens will bear the burden of another. And never would We punish until We sent a messenger} [al-Isra' 17:15].

As for one who grows up in a place where the call of the messenger did not reach him, or it reached him in a distorted form, and he did not see evidence to prove its soundness, and what he heard does not count as proof that would leave no excuse for him, then in this case it is up to Allah in the hereafter. Allah, He be exalted, has promised that He will not punish His slaves without the clear message having reached them.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

No one will enter Paradise except those who affirm the oneness of Allah, who are the people of “La ilaha illa Allah (there is no god worthy of worship except Allah).” This is the right of Allah over each of His slaves, as it was narrated in al-Bukhari and Muslim from Mu`adh (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said to him: “O Mu`adh, do you know what is the right of Allah over His slaves?” I said: Allah and His Messenger know best. He said: “His right over them is that they should worship Him and not associate anything with Him…”

No one will escape the punishment of Allah except those who devoted themselves to Allah and worshipped Him alone, and called upon Him with sincere devotion. As for those who did not associate anything with Him and did not worship Him, so they did not worship Him or worship anything other than Him, like Pharaoh and his ilk, they are worse than the polytheists. So it is obligatory to worship Allah alone, and this is obligatory for everyone, and it cannot be waived for anyone at all. This is what Islam means in general terms, and Allah will not accept any religion other than Islam.

But Allah will not punish anyone until He sends a messenger to him; however, even though He does not punish such a person, no one will enter Paradise except a believing Muslim; no polytheist and no person who is too arrogant to worship his Lord will enter it. So the one whom the call did not reach in this world will be tested in the hereafter, and no one will enter hell except one who followed the Shaytan. The one who has no sin on his record will not enter the fire, for Allah does not punish anyone with fire until after He sends a messenger to them. So for the one whom the call of the messenger who was sent to him did not reach, such as an infant, one who is insane and one who died during the interval between two prophets, he will be tested in the hereafter, as it says in the reports. (End quote from *Majmu` al-Fatawa*, 14/476-477.

For more information, please see the answer to question no. 232218.

And Allah knows best.