482155 - Divine Attributes Manifested in Allah’s Actions

the question

In a class on creed (`aqidah) we were told that the speech of Allah is a divine attribute that is connected to Allah’s Essence in terms of its category, and it is an attribute that is manifested in His actions. So can we say the same with regard to other divine attributes that are manifested in Allah’s actions, such as mercy, anger, and descending?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

I.

The divine attribute that is manifested in Allah’s actions is an attribute of the Lord of Glory that is eternal and constant, and the action that is connected to it happens repeatedly, such as speech, creation, granting provision and showing mercy.

The Lord of Glory, may He be Glorified, always has the attribute of speech, and He speaks whenever He wants. Similarly, He always has the attribute of creating and creates whenever He wants; so that is part of His Essence and is eternal, and it is manifested in His actions because it is dependent on His will and is repeated.

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

Hence the view of the majority of Ahl as-Sunnah – and it is the well-known view among the companions of Imam Ahmad and Abu Hanifah, and others among the Malikis, Shafa`is and Sufis, the scholars of hadith, and different groups among the scholars of kalam (Islamic philosophers) such as the Karamis and others – is that the divine attributes of being a creator, a provider, a granter of life, a causer of death, a resurrector, an inheritor and so on are attributes that are

manifested in His actions.

And they are attributes of His Essence too; one who creates is not like one who does not create.

End quote from *Majmu` al-Fatawa*, 12/435.

Shaykh `Abd ar-Rahman al-Barrak (may Allah preserve him) said in *At-Ta`liq `ala al-Qawa'id al-Muthla*, p. 78:

Some of the divine attributes may be described as attributes of His Essence that are manifested in His actions, such as speaking, creating and granting provision. That is on the basis that Allah constantly has these attributes. So you may say: Allah always does what He wants, and He is always creating, He is always forgiving, and He is always merciful. Therefore, in that sense, these are attributes of His Essence.

But when these attributes are manifested in His actions, they are dependent on His will. Thus He shows mercy to whomever He wills if He wills, and He grants provision to whomever He wills if He wills, and He speaks if He wills.

Speech is a divine attribute from eternity, but when it is manifested, it has a beginning and an end. Thus speech is a divine attribute of His Essence that is manifested in action, creating is a divine attribute of His Essence that is manifested in action, and the fact that He, may He be Exalted, is oft-forgiving is a divine attribute of His Essence that is manifested in action, and so on.

II.

Descending to the lowest heaven is a divine attribute that is manifested in action and is referred to in the hadiths, as al-Bukhari (1145) and Muslim (1261) narrated from Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Our Lord, may He be Blessed and Exalted, descends every night to the lowest heaven when the last third of the night remains, and He says, 'Who will call upon Me that I might answer him, who will ask of Me that I might give him, who will seek My forgiveness, that I might forgive him?'"

Descending to the lowest heaven is not a divine attribute that is eternal, nor is its manifestation in action eternal, because we know that it only occured after the lowest heaven came into existence. Hence it is not correct to say that descending is a divine attribute from eternity.

However, some of the scholars regard descending as a divine attribute that is eternal, and say that this action is from eternity, and Allah is always doing that and does that whenever He wills. And they said that in terms of category, this action is eternal, and the action of descending has a beginning and an end, and happens repeatedly.

Shaykh as-Sa`di said in *At-Tanbihat al-Latifah fima Ahtawat `alayhi al-Wasitiyyah min al-Mabahith al-Munifah*, p. 48:

Another idea noted by Shaykh al-Islam and others is:

The divine attributes that are manifested in words and actions are eternal, but each incident thereof a beginning and end, such as speaking, creating, providing, descending and so on. The divine attributes of speaking, creating, providing and descending are eternal, but they happen repeatedly, according to the wisdom of the Lord, may He be Glorified, as He says: {No fresh revelation comes to them from their Lord, but they listen to it in ridicule} [Al-Anbiya' 21:2]. Another example is the creation of Adam after he was not created, and so on. And the same applies to providing and speaking.

As for attributes of His Essence such as His hand, His foot, His hearing, His seeing, they are eternal, like His Essence. End quote.

Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) said: The attributes of the divine Essence are attributes that are unchanging from eternity to eternity, such as life, knowledge, power, hearing, seeing, glory, wisdom and so on. These attributes are many, and we call them attributes of His Essence, because they are His attributes from eternity to eternity, and are never separated from His Essence.

As for the attributes that are manifested in His actions, they are those that are dependent on His

will: if He wills He does them, and if He wills He does not do them, such as rising over the Throne, descending to the lowest heaven, coming to judge between His slaves, rejoicing at the repentance of one who repents, smiling at two men, one of whom kills the other and both of them enter Paradise, becoming angry with the disbelievers, becoming pleased with the believers, and so on. These attributes are manifested in His actions, because they are His actions, and His actions are dependent on His will.

But this category of divine attributes, when they happen, have a beginning and an end, and they come one after another. As for the category of these attributes, they are eternal. Thus the category of Allah's actions – i.e., that Allah does actions – is something eternal, so He has always been doing actions and will always continue to do actions, and there will not come a time when Allah, may He be exalted, will be idle and not doing any action, for Allah has been and always will be doing what He wills, may He be Glorified and Exalted.

But every action on its own is not eternal, and has a beginning and an end.

For example, rising above the Throne is one of the divine actions of Allah, and it has a beginning, because it happened after He created the Throne. Similarly, descending to the lowest heaven is one of the divine actions of Allah, and it has a beginning, because it happened after the creation of the lowest heaven. And His becoming pleased and becoming angry are divine actions of Allah, and they have a beginning, because if a person does a deed that leads to Allah's pleasure, then Allah will be pleased with him, and if he does an action that leads to His anger, then Allah will be angry with him.

End quote from *Sharh as-Safariniyyah*, p. 155; see also p. 241.

Allah's anger is also included in that, because it has a beginning each time it happens.

Similarly, Shaykh `Abd al-`Aziz as-Salman said *in Al-Kawashif al-Jaliyyah `ala al-Wasitiyyah*, p. 430, giving example of divine attributes that are manifested in His actions: Rising above the Throne, descending, smiling, coming, being amazed, rejoicing, being pleased, loving, hating, and so on. These are divine attributes from eternity, but are manifested time after time, and have a

beginning each time they happen, and you could say before them: if He wills. End quote.

Conclusion:

Some of the scholars stated clearly that these divine attributes are of a type that is manifested in actions. This is scholarly terminology, the main point of which is to prove that these attributes are dependent on His will, and that Allah descends whenever He wills and becomes angry whenever He wills.

And Allah knows best.