

Allah's Devine Justice System

Question : When Allah says in Quran to Whom He wishes He can forgive and to Whom He Wishes punish, This is apparently against justice system, How Quran, Ahadith and scholars explain this subject as Allah is the best of the best judge.

This is an excellent and deep question—and one that many sincere believers have pondered. This is also an excellent theological question that touches on Allah's divine attributes of ****Justice ('Adl)**** and ****Will (Iradah)****. Islamic scholars address this through several key principles from the Quran and Sunnah:

When the Qur'an says:

لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَإِنْ تُبْذَرُوا مَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَوْ تُخْفَوُهُ يُحَاسِبْكُمْ بِهِ اللَّهُ فَيَغْفِرُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ وَالنَّصَارَى نَحْنُ أَبْنَاءُ اللَّهِ وَأَحِبَّاؤُهُ قُلْ فَلِمَ يُعَذِّبُكُمْ بِذُنُوبِكُمْ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ بَشَرٌ مِمَّنْ خَلَقَ يَغْفِرُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَلِلَّهِ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا وَإِلَيْهِ الْمَصِيرُ

وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ يَغْفِرُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

-----“He forgives whom He wills, and punishes whom He wills...”

(e.g., Surah Al-Baqarah 2:284, Al-Ma'idah 5:18, Aal-e-Imran 3:129)

—on the surface, it may seem arbitrary to a human reader. But Islamic scholars have unanimously clarified that Allah’s will is always tied to His perfect justice and wisdom—never to injustice or favoritism.

Let’s break this down clearly:



Does Allah forgive and punish arbitrarily? No.

According to classical and contemporary scholars, Allah’s decisions are never without wisdom, justice, or fairness.

The key is this:

“Allah does what He wills — but He only wills what is just, wise, and appropriate.”

This principle is supported by both Qur’anic verses and Hadith.



1. Allah is never unjust

وَعَلَى الَّذِينَ هَادُوا حَرَّمْنَا مَا قَصَصْنَا عَلَيْكَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَمَا ظَلَمْنَاهُمْ وَلَكِنْ كَانُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ

“-----We did not wrong them; they wronged themselves.”
— (Surah An-Nahl 16:118)

وَوُضِعَ الْكِتَابُ فَتَرَى الْمُجْرِمِينَ مُشْفِقِينَ مِمَّا فِيهِ وَيَقُولُونَ يَا وَيْلَتَنَا مَالِ هَذَا الْكِتَابِ لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا وَوَجَدُوا مَا عَمِلُوا حَاضِرًا وَلَا يَظْلِمُ رَبُّكَ أَحَدًا

“-----Your Lord does not wrong anyone.”

— (Surah Al-Kahf 18:49)

Scholars like Imam Al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyyah, and Imam Nawawi have emphasized that Allah’s will (mashiyyah) is never divorced from His justice (‘adl) and mercy (rahmah).

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2. “He forgives whom He wills” – but for a reason

Allah forgives whom He wills — but His forgiveness is not random.

It is based on:

- True repentance (tawbah)
- Sincerity (ikhlas)
- His knowledge of the heart and future
- Hardship or trials someone faced in life
- Sometimes without a known cause—as an act of pure grace

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ افْتَرَىٰ إِثْمًا عَظِيمًا

“Indeed, Allah does not forgive associating partners with Him, but He forgives whatever is less than that for whom He wills.”

— (Surah An-Nisa 4:48)

So, even here, He is telling us: He may forgive sins except shirk, and that too when a person dies without repentance.



3. Punishment is always deserved, forgiveness is a gift

According to scholars:

- If a person is punished, it is because of their actions.
- If a person is forgiven, it is not because they “deserved” forgiveness, but because Allah chose to overlook and show mercy.

This is the same principle behind the names:

- Al-‘Adl (The Just)
 - Al-Ghafoor (The Forgiving)
 - Al-Hakeem (The Wise)
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4. Scholars’ Explanation

- ◆ Ibn Kathir on “He forgives whom He wills...”

Allah forgives whoever repents or whom He knows to have some good, and He punishes those who deserve it — and He does not wrong anyone.

- ◆ Imam Al-Ghazali (in Al-Maqsad Al-Asna)

When Allah forgives whom He wills, this is from His Mercy — and

not injustice to others.

When He punishes, it is only with perfect knowledge of guilt, and therefore perfectly just.

◆ Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (Tafsir al-Kabir)

The will of Allah does not mean random choice. His will is informed by His complete knowledge of the hidden and manifest actions, motives, and hearts of His slaves.



5. A Powerful Hadith Qudsi (Sahih Muslim)


Allah says:


“O My servants! I have forbidden oppression upon Myself and made it forbidden among you, so do not oppress one another...”

This proves:


- Allah has self-imposed limits: He has forbidden injustice, even though He could do whatever He wants.
- This makes His forgiveness and punishment meaningful, wise, and perfectly just.


Here is the explanation of “He forgives whom He wills and punishes whom He wills” in Q&A format—based on Qur’an, Hadith, and classical scholars’ tafsir:

 Q1: Doesn't it sound unfair that Allah forgives whoever He wants and punishes whoever He wants?


 A: At first glance, it may seem that way, but in Islam, Allah's will is never random or unjust. His forgiveness is based on His complete knowledge, mercy, and the inner state of the person. His punishment is always just and deserved. The Qur'an says clearly:


“Your Lord does not wrong anyone.”
(Surah Al-Kahf 18:49)

 Q2: So is punishment also based on Allah's will?

 A: Yes, but Allah only punishes those who deserve it due to their actions, intentions, or disbelief. No one is punished unfairly.

“We wronged them not, but they were wronging themselves.” —
(Qur'an 16:118)

 Q3: What about people who commit sins but are forgiven? Is that fair?

 A: Yes. Forgiveness is a gift of mercy, not a reward. It is based on:

- Sincere repentance
- Good deeds

- Allah's hidden knowledge about that person's heart
- Sometimes, Allah forgives as an act of pure grace

Forgiveness is not “owed”—it is granted by Allah out of His mercy.



Q4: Isn't Allah free to do whatever He wants?



A: Yes, Allah can do whatever He wills. But He also says:

“Indeed, Allah does not do injustice, even as much as an atom.”
— (Surah An-Nisa 4:40)

So although He is all-powerful, He chooses not to act unjustly. His actions are always wise, just, and merciful.



Q5: Then why does the Qur'an say “He punishes whom He wills and forgives whom He wills”?



A: This phrase teaches us two things:

1. Human beings don't control forgiveness or punishment — it is ultimately up to Allah.
2. We should not judge who deserves paradise or hell — Allah sees what we do not see.



Q6: Do scholars agree that Allah never acts unjustly?



A: Yes. All major scholars — like Imam Al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Kathir, Al-Razi — agree that:

“Allah’s will is tied to His wisdom and justice.”
He does not forgive or punish without reason.



Q7: Can Allah punish someone even if they didn’t act on a sin they thought about?



A: No. Prophet ﷺ said in Sahih Muslim:

“Allah has forgiven my ummah for what they think, as long as they do not speak or act upon it.”

Only firm intentions or actions are held accountable.



Q8: What’s the believer’s response to verses like these?



A: As the Sahabah (companions) responded when this verse was revealed:

“سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا”

“We hear and we obey.” — (Surah Al-Baqarah 2:285)

We trust that Allah’s knowledge and mercy are beyond ours, and we submit.

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Further Explanation about Allah's forgiveness and punishment!

1. **Allah's Absolute Sovereignty & Perfect Wisdom**

The Quran explicitly states:

> لَا يُسْأَلُ عَمَّا يَفْعَلُ وَهُمْ يُسْأَلُونَ >

> **"He is not questioned about what He does, but they will be questioned."*

> (Quran 21:23)

- **Divine Wisdom (Hikmah):** Allah's actions are never arbitrary. His "choice" to forgive or punish is rooted in infinite wisdom beyond human comprehension. What appears selective to us operates within a perfect cosmic justice system only He fully grasps.

2. **Forgiveness is Tied to Repentance & Conditions**

Allah links forgiveness to human choices:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَغْفِرُ أَنْ يُشْرَكَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرُ مَا دُونَ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَنْ يُشْرِكْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ افْتَرَىٰ
إِثْمًا عَظِيمًا

> **"Indeed, Allah does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills."*

> (Quran 4:48)

- **Key Explanation:**

- **Shirk (polytheism)** is unforgivable *unless repented from before death*.

- For other sins, forgiveness depends on:

- **Repentance (Tawbah):** Sincere turning to Allah

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا تَوْبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَوْبَةً نَّصُوحًا عَسَىٰ رَبُّكُمْ أَن يُكَفِّرَ عَنْكُم سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَيُدْخِلَكُم جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ يَوْمَ لَا يُخْزِي اللَّهُ النَّبِيَّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ نُورُهُمْ يَسْعَىٰ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَبِأَيْمَانِهِمْ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَتِمِّمْ لَنَا نُورَنَا وَاعْفِرْ لَنَا إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ (Quran 66:8).

- **Allah's Mercy:** His will to forgive aligns with His knowledge of a person's heart, effort, and circumstances.

3. **Allah's Mercy Prevails Over His Wrath**

وَإِذَا جَاءَكَ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِآيَاتِنَا فَقُلْ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ كَتَبَ رَبُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ أَنَّهُ مَن عَمِلَ مِنكُمْ سُوءًا بِجَهَالَةٍ ثُمَّ تَابَ مِن بَعْدِهِ وَأَصْلَحَ فَإِنَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

> **"-----Your Lord has decreed upon Himself mercy.-----"

> (Quran 6:54)

- **Divine Priority:** Allah's default attribute is mercy. Punishment is the *exception* when justice demands it.

- **Hadith Qudsi:**

> **"My mercy precedes My wrath." (Sahih Bukhari).

4. **Human "Deservingness" is Measured Holistically**

Allah's judgment considers factors humans cannot:

- **Hidden repentance**
- **Future potential**
- **Unseen struggles**

- **Societal impact of forgiveness/punishment**

وَنَضَعُ الْمَوَازِينَ الْقِسْطَ لِيَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ فَلَا تُظْلَمُ نَفْسٌ شَيْئًا وَإِنْ كَانَ مِثْقَالَ حَبَّةٍ مِّنْ حَرْدَلٍ أَتَيْنَا بِهَا وَكَفَى بِنَا حَاسِبِينَ

- > **"We will set up scales of justice for the Day of Resurrection, so no soul will be wronged at all..."*
- > (Quran 21:47)

5. **The "Apparent Paradox" Resolved**

Scholars like **Ibn Taymiyyah** and **Al-Ghazali** clarify:

- **Justice ('Adl):** Allah *never* wrongs anyone (Quran 4:40).
What He gives is inherently just.
- **Will (Iradah):** His "choice" to forgive reflects mercy beyond obligatory justice. Humans deserve punishment; forgiveness is a *bonus* from His grace.

****Analogy:**** A king may pardon some criminals (based on their remorse/reform) while punishing others. This isn't injustice—it's mercy combined with wisdom.

Conclusion: Mercy Within a Framework of Justice

Allah's "selective" forgiveness is:

- **Not injustice**, but **supererogatory mercy** (Fadl).
- **Conditional** upon human actions and repentance.
- **Rooted in wisdom** that humans cannot fully grasp.

As **Imam Ali (RA)** said:

> **"Allah's justice is the very foundation of the universe."*

This preserves Allah's perfection as **الْعَدْلُ الْحَكَمُ** (The Utterly Just Judge) while affirming His limitless mercy.

NOTE: It is also important to mention here this statement of Whom He wants to forgives or punish gives a clear message to people who think that pious people, Saints, Allah's Wali, His Messengers have the power to intercede or change His decision on any ones behalf. He has sole authority and intercession of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (SAW) will be done on our behalf with His permission only.