

Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah and the Foundational Principles of the Khārijite Renegades (H): Making Error (Khaṭā') Bound to Sinfulness (Ithm)

In the various works of Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah (728H) is a very insightful, detailed and elaborate analysis of the Khārijite doctrine and the underlying reasons for its appearance. From the foundational errors of the Khārijites is that they make error (khaṭā') bound to sinfulness (ithm), and from that point they are led in the direction of takfīr.

Ibn Taymiyyah (رحمته الله) said: “The people of misguidance considered error (khaṭā') and sin (ithm) to be mutually binding. Sometimes they exaggerate and say they [their leaders] are infallible. And at other times they are harsh towards them and say they have transgressed in their error. As for the people of knowledge and faith, they do not consider them infallible nor sinful. It is from this angle that many of the sects of innovation and misguidance arose. A group of them reviled the Salaf and cursed them due to their belief that they had committed sins, that whoever commits sins deserves to be punished. They may consider them sinners or disbelievers as was done by the Khārijites, those who declared ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib and ‘Uthmān bin ‘Affān and whoever allied with them to be disbelievers. They cursed and reviled them and declared fighting against them lawful.”¹

Amongst the errors of the Khārijites is that they consider error and sin to be bound to each other such that whoever erred was automatically considered to have been sinful. This opposes the principle of Islām, of its Sharī'ah, that a person can fall into error (khaṭā') without being sinful and that those who fall into such errors

¹ Majmū' al-Fatāwā (35/69-70).

are pardoned for these errors. This is because whilst error can be both deliberate and undeliberate, it is mostly undeliberate, meaning that one opposes what is correct without deliberate intent. Ibn Taymiyyah said, “It is known that the word error (khaṭa’) departs from deliberateness (‘amad).”² However, the Khārijites made error bound to the state of sinfulness, such that everyone who erred or opposed the truth was thereby sinful. Thereafter, the Khārijites said that Allāh’s threats must be implemented just as His promises are implemented because He is always truthful to His word. As a result they judged that the sinners will be in Hellfire eternally and would never come out of it, neither by intercession nor by Allāh’s forgiveness and mercy. They held this view to affirm the truthfulness of Allāh who they claimed must implement His threat for Him to be truthful in what He stated. This was another error, since Allāh’s threat is unlike His promise, which He always fulfils. He may not implement His threat if He so chooses from His mercy, compassion and wisdom.

Practically speaking, from the sum of what the Khārijites see from the Muslim rulers, scholars and Muslims who do not agree with them is what amounts to unintended error for which they are pardoned in the Islāmic Sharīah, with the meaning that there is no burden of sin upon them for which they will be punished. However, the Khārijites consider these to be sins (āthām, dhunūb) and they add these affairs on top of others on account of which they make takfīr of the rulers or other Muslims and these affairs serve to compound their misguidance even further, convincing them that they are right.

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² Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā (20/22).