

A Comparative Study of the Criterion of Divine Pleasure (Riḍā) in the System of Intercession (Shafā'ah) from the Perspectives of 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Fakhr al-Rāzī (Based on the Exegeses al-Mizān and Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb)

Ali Mohammad Shokri Cheshmeh Sabzi¹ , Meysam Akbarzadeh² ,
Naser Momeni³ , and Mahdi Khademi⁴ 

1. Department of Theology, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: ali.shchs49@gmail.com
2. *Corresponding Author*, Department of Theology, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: M_akbarzadeh@pnu.ac.ir
3. Department of Theology, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: nmomeni73@pnu.ac.ir
4. Department of Theology, Payame Noor University, Tehran, Iran. E-mail: khademi.mm@gmail.com

Article Info

Article type:
Research Article

Article history:

Received
25 June 2025
Received in revised form
30 July 2025
Accepted
25 August 2025
Available online
22 December 2025

Keywords:

Intercession (shafā'ah),
criterion of divine
pleasure (mullāk-i
riḍā-yi ilāhī),
'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī,
Fakhr al-Rāzī

ABSTRACT

Intercession (shafā'ah) is one of the core beliefs in the Islamic doctrinal system. According to the explicit statement of the Noble Qur'ān, its realization is conditional upon divine pleasure (riḍā). The verse, "And they do not intercede except for whom He is pleased with" (wa lā yashfā 'ūna illā liman irtaḍā, Q. 21:28) indicates this dependence, yet the criterion (mullāk) of God's pleasure in this and other verses is not explicitly stated. This ambiguity constitutes the main problem of the present research. Employing a descriptive-analytical method and a comparative approach, this article examines the views of 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Fakhr al-Rāzī concerning the criterion of divine pleasure in the system of intercession, based on their respective exegeses, al-Mizān and Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb. The findings indicate that both thinkers consider pleasure with the individual's religion as the criterion of divine pleasure. 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, in addition to faith (īmān), regards purity of the soul (tahārat-i nafs) as a primary condition. Fakhr al-Rāzī, by contrast, relying on ḥadīth traditions, emphasizes heartfelt belief in divine unity (tawḥīd). Furthermore, both thinkers propose supplementary criteria such as righteous action ('amal-i ṣāliḥ), piety (taqwā), truthfulness (ṣidq), emigration (hijrah), and striving (jihād). In 'Allāmah's view, intercession includes sinning believers from among the "companions of the right hand" (aṣḥāb al-yamīn), whereas Fakhr al-Rāzī, within the framework of Ash'arī foundations, considers intercession to be realizable also for immoral believers (mu'minīn-i fāsiq). Overall, 'Allāmah's perspective exhibits greater coherence with divine justice ('adl) and wisdom (ḥikmah).

Cite this article: Shokri Cheshmeh Sabzi, A.-M., Akbarzadeh, M., Momeni, N., & Khademi, M. (2025). A Comparative Study of the Criterion of Divine Pleasure (Riḍā) in the System of Intercession (Shafā'ah) from the Perspectives of 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Fakhr al-Rāzī (Based on the Exegeses al-Mizān and Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb). *Theology Journal*, 12(2), 205-227. <https://doi.org/10.22034/pke.2025.21724.2014>.



1. Introduction

Intercession (shafā'ah) is among the foundational doctrines in Islamic theology (kalām), rooted in the Noble Qur'ān and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In religious terminology, intercession refers to the mediation of prophets, divine saints (awliyā'), and angels before God for the forgiveness of sinners or the elevation of believers' ranks. This doctrine reflects divine mercy (raḥmah) and forgiveness (maghfirah) toward servants. The Noble Qur'ān accepts the principle of intercession but does not consider it absolute or unconditional. Rather, benefiting from this grace is contingent upon the pleasure (riḍā) of God Almighty, as explicitly stated in Q. 21:28: "And they do not intercede except for whom He is pleased with" (wa lā yashfa'ūna illā liman irtaḍā).

Nevertheless, explaining the criterion of "divine pleasure" and applying it to specific cases has been a subject of ongoing debate among Muslim exegetes (mufasssīrūn) and theologians (mutakallimūn). In theological and exegetical sources, fundamental questions have arisen: What is meant by "divine pleasure" (irtidā)? Who are those who are included in this pleasure? Is mere faith in God sufficient, or are righteous action ('amal-i ṣāliḥ) and inner purity (ṭahārat-i bāṭinī) also required? These questions have given rise to diverse perspectives, indicating the importance and sensitivity of the subject.

The present research focuses on two prominent theological figures—'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī (a Shī'ī theologian and author of the exegesis *al-Mīzān*) and Fakhr al-Rāzī (an Ash'arī theologian and author of the exegesis *Mafāṭīḥ al-Ghayb*)—to conduct a comparative study of the criteria of divine pleasure in the system of intercession. This choice is justified because both thinkers, in addition to their distinguished positions in exegetical discussions, possess a profound approach to theological issues, and their works represent a treasure trove of doctrinal discussions. The present research seeks, through a careful analysis of the views of these two Islamic thinkers, to present a clear picture of the criteria of divine pleasure in the system of intercession and, through comparative analysis, to reveal the points of agreement and disagreement between their perspectives.

The significance of this research is noteworthy at both theoretical and practical levels: at the theoretical level, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between intercession and divine pleasure; at the practical level, by explaining the criteria of God's pleasure, it can enhance religious motivation and efforts toward deserving to benefit from intercession.

2. Methodology

This research was organized using a descriptive-analytical method and a comparative approach. First, key concepts such as "intercession" and "divine pleasure" were examined by reference to lexical and terminological sources to provide a conceptual framework for analysis. Subsequently, the views of

‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī in al-Mīzān and Fakhr al-Rāzī in Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb were extracted and systematically categorized. The main focus of the analysis was to examine the criteria that each of these two figures enumerated for the realization of divine pleasure in benefiting from intercession.

Primary data were obtained from the two core sources—al-Mīzān and Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb—and, for supplementation and critique, library sources and contemporary research in the fields of theology and exegesis were also utilized. In the analysis stage, each exegete's view was first examined independently, and then, through a comparative analysis, their similarities and differences were clarified. Finally, an effort was made to identify a more coherent and effective perspective through the evaluation of rational and transmitted foundations.

3. Findings

Examination of ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī's view reveals that he considers intercession as a real and existential (takwīnī) matter that is consistent with the divine tradition (sunnat-i ilāhī) in guiding and elevating human beings. He believes that the primary condition for the realization of intercession is "divine pleasure" (irtīḍā’), i.e., God's pleasure with the faith and inner purity of those being interceded for. In his view, mere outward affiliation with faith is insufficient; rather, the spirit of faith must be rooted in the individual's soul. Purity of the soul (ṭahārat-i nafs) and distance from polytheism (shirk) are considered the fundamental criteria for this pleasure. For this reason, a true believer, even if sinful, can be included in intercession, but an unbeliever or hypocrite will be deprived of this grace. This interpretation accords an important place to human agency and responsibility, portraying the relationship between divine justice (‘adl) and mercy (raḥmah) in a balanced manner.

Fakhr al-Rāzī, by contrast, with a different approach, emphasizes the hopeful dimension of intercession rather than inner purity. He considers divine pleasure to arise primarily from God's gratuitous favor (tafaḍḍul) and will (irādah), and from this perspective, he delineates a broader scope for intercession. In his view, even some sinful Muslims who lack complete inner purity may, through divine grace and the intercession of the Prophet (peace be upon him), be included in forgiveness. Although Fakhr al-Rāzī also considers faith as a necessary condition, his criteria are more flexible than those of ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī.

Comparison of the two perspectives shows that ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī has paid greater attention to the epistemological, ethical, and educational dimensions of the criterion of divine pleasure. Fakhr al-Rāzī, however, from the perspective of hope and divine grace, has considered more tolerant dimensions, which itself has opened the door of mercy in the minds of believers. At the same time, both thinkers agree on accepting the principle that

intercession is conditional upon divine pleasure, and this common point forms the general framework of theological discussions in this field.

4. Conclusion

The final synthesis of the research indicates that ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī’s explanation possesses greater coherence and comprehensiveness due to its utilization of rational and transmitted foundations and its emphasis on human agency and purity of the soul. By drawing a boundary between the true believer and the immoral person (fāsiq), he presents an educational model that prevents laxity in religiosity and lays the groundwork for ethical and spiritual excellence.

Fakhr al-Rāzī, with a hope-oriented approach, considers a broader inclusion for intercession and pays special attention to the aspects of divine grace and mercy. Although his perspective is less coherent, its positive impact in creating hope and reliance on divine mercy within the religious community cannot be overlooked.

This research has answered five fundamental questions concerning the criteria of divine pleasure, the results of which provide a new horizon for future studies. The most important recommendation for future research is a comparative study of the perspectives of other theological schools, including the Mu‘tazilah and Ashā‘irah, in relation to the Shī‘ī tradition. Such studies can lead to a more precise understanding of the theoretical and practical dimensions of divine pleasure and the conditions for benefiting from intercession, and at a broader level, can pave the way for inter-sectarian dialogue and interaction within the Muslim world.

Declarations

Authors’ Contributions: Equal contributions were made by all four authors in developing the research, collecting and analyzing data, and writing the article.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: The authors express no acknowledgments to any person or organization.

Ethical Considerations: All authors confirm that ethical principles were followed in the conduct and publication of this study.

Funding: The authors did not receive any grants from public, commercial, or non-profit sectors.

Conflict of Interest: The authors state that they have no conflict of interest.

Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies Statement: Generative AI was not used in any part of the writing process.