

Suratul Baqarah: Verses 75-82

(٧٥) أَفَتَطْمَعُونَ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا لَكُمْ وَقَدْ كَانَ فَرِيقٌ مِّنْهُمْ يَسْمَعُونَ كَلَامَ اللَّهِ ثُمَّ يُحَرِّفُونَهُ مِن بَعْدِ مَا عَقَلُوهُ وَهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ

(٧٦) وَإِذَا لَقُوا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قَالُوا آمَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَا بِغَضِبِهِمْ إِلَى بَعْضٍ قَالُوا أَتُحَدِّثُونَهُم بِمَا فَتَحَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْكُمْ لِيُحَاجُّوكُمْ بِهِ عِنْدَ رَبِّكُمْ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

(٧٧) وَلَا يَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا يُسِرُّونَ وَمَا يُعْلِنُونَ

(٧٨) وَمِنْهُمْ أُمِّيُونَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا أَمَانِيٍّ وَإِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَظُنُّونَ

(٧٩) فَوَيْلٌ لِلَّذِينَ يَكْتُبُونَ الْكِتَابَ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ ثُمَّ يَقُولُونَ هَذَا مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ لِيَشْتَرُوا بِهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا فَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِّمَّا كَتَبَتْ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَوَيْلٌ لَهُمْ مِّمَّا يَكْسِبُونَ

(٨٠) وَقَالُوا لَنْ تَمَسَّنَا النَّارُ إِلَّا أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَةً قُلْ أَتَّخَذْتُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ عَهْدًا فَلَنْ يُخْلَفَ اللَّهُ عَهْدَهُ أَمْ تَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

(٨١) بَلَىٰ مَنْ كَسَبَ سَيِّئَةً وَأَحَاطَتْ بِهِ خَطِيئَتُهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

(٨٢) وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

Do you then hope that they would believe in you? While a party from among them indeed used to hear the word of Allah, then altered it after they had understood it, and they know (this) (75).

And when they meet those who believe they say: "We believe"; and when they are alone one with another they say: "Do you talk to them of what Allah has disclosed to you that they may argue with you by this before your Lord? Do you not then understand?" (76).

What! Do they not know that Allah knows what they conceal and what they proclaim? (77).

And there are among them illiterates who know not the Book but only lies, and they do but conjecture (78).

Woe, then, to those who write the book with their hands and then say: "This is from Allah ", so that they may sell it for a small price; therefore woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for what they earn (thereby) (79).

And they say: "Fire shall not touch us but for a few days. " Say: "Have you taken a promise from Allah, then Allah will never fail to keep His promise, or do you speak against Allah what you do not know?" (80).

Yea! whoever earns evil and his sins beset him on every side, these are the inmates of the Fire; in it they shall abide (81).

And (as for) those who believe and do good deeds, these are the dwellers of the garden; in it they shall abide (82)

Commentary

The context shows that the unbelievers, and especially those of Medina, thought that the Jews were the likeliest people to help and support the Apostle of Allah at his advent. The pagan tribes of Aws and Khazraj lived with the Jews of Medina, and they knew that the latter followed a divine religion and a revealed book. Thus it was not too much to expect them to believe in the latest in the series of divine religions and books.

This was the basis of their hope that the Jews would accept the Apostle of Allah as the true prophet, and would strengthen the cause of religion, and actively participate in the propagation of truth. But no sooner did the Prophet migrate to Medina than the Jews showed their latent hostility. The hope was shattered and the expectation turned to disappointment.

That is why Allah addresses the believers, saying: “Do you then hope that they would believe in you?” Concealment of truth and alteration of divine words was their deep-rooted life-pattern. Why wonder if they go back on what they used to say before the advent of Islam?

Qur'an: *Do you then hope . . . and they know this:* The speech is now addressed to the Prophet and the believers, referring to the Jews in third person. This same style was used in the preceding story of the Cow, because the Jews had omitted the event from the Torah. These verses continue that mode of address because it exposes their habit of altering and manipulating the divine book.

Qur'an: *And when they meet those who believe . . . and what they proclaim:* The two conditional clauses, “when they meet those who believe” and “when they are alone one with another” are not in opposition to each other – as were the clauses in the verse:

And when they meet those who believe, they say: “We believe”; and when they are alone with their Satans, they say: “Surely we are with you, we were only mocking (2 : 14) .

Here the two clauses simply describe two instances of the Jews' transgressions and ignorance:

First: They indulge in hypocrisy, showing that they have accepted Islam, and trying in this way to protect themselves from trouble, ridicule and even death.

Second: They want to deceive Allah, forgetting that He is the Knower of the seen and the unseen, Aware of what they conceal and what they proclaim.

We may infer from the verses that the Jewish laity in Medina sometimes talked openly with the believers, telling them of some of the foretellings about the Prophet or giving them some information that proved the truth of Islam and its Prophet.

But their leaders used to admonish them for it, telling them that it was a thing revealed to them, it should not be disclosed to the believers, lest they argued with the Jews before the Lord – as though if the believers did not argue with them before God, He would not know of it!

Such thinking implies that Allah knew only the apparent, not the hidden and concealed things or thoughts. Allah refuted this foolish idea and said: “What! Do they not know that Allah knows what they conceal and what they proclaim?”

It is our, and not God's, knowledge which is limited to the seen and does not comprehend the unseen, because our perception depends on the senses which in their turn depend on body organs – equipped

with nervous instruments, surrounded by space and time, influenced by a hundred other material causes.

This talk also throws light on the materialistic outlook of the Israelites. They were so steeped in that belief that they applied the human limitations to God too. They thought that God was present and active inside the matter and prevailed over it.

But that presence and that control and management were based on the same principles as a material cause brings out and controls a material effect. Such a belief was not a specialty of the Jews; it was and is held even by those followers of Islam who believe in fundamentality of matter.

For these people, God's life, knowledge, power, choice, will, decree, order and management have the same meanings as do their own life, knowledge etc. It is a disease for which there is no cure. And the signs and warnings can avail nothing to a people who do not understand.

Such views have made Islam a laughing-stock in the eyes of those who have no access to the true faith and correct Islamic knowledge. Those detractors say: The Muslims ascribe to their Prophet the saying, "Allah created Adam in His likeness"; and these followers of the Prophet have created a god in the likeness of Adam.

One group of the Muslims ascribes to its Lord all the qualities of the matter. Another group does not understand anything of God's beautiful attributes; consequently it reduces all divine attributes to negatives. It says that the names and adjectives, which are used for both God and His creatures, have quite different meanings in both cases.

When we say, "God is Existent, Knowing, Powerful and Alive", the words denote some divine qualities totally incomprehensible to us, completely different from the meanings they have when they are applied to a human being.

Therefore, it is necessary to reduce these words to their negatives. What the above sentence, for example, means is this: "God is not non-existent, not unaware, not powerless and not lifeless."

Such explanation implies that they believe in that which they do not understand, worship that which they are uncertain about and invite others to believe in that which neither they nor anyone else knows anything about.

The word of truth is enough to dispel such falsehoods. The people have been admonished by the true religion to hold fast to the essence of reality and steer clear between the above-mentioned two extremes.

They should know that Allah is not like His creatures, nor is He a set of negative propositions. The true religion directs common people to believe that Allah is a thing, unlike other things; that He has knowledge, unlike our knowledge; power, unlike our power; and will, not produced by contemplation; that

He talks, not with a mouth; and hears, not with ears.

As for the people of higher understanding, they must ponder on His signs and acquire deep knowledge of His religion. He has said:

Say: `Are those who know and those who do not know alike?’ Only those possessed of understanding shall bear in mind (39:9).

The people of higher understanding are not equal to a common man in their knowledge of truth and religion; likewise, the two are not alike in their respective responsibilities. This, therefore, is the teaching of religion for both groups respectively; it is there for them to follow, would they do so?

Qur’an: And *there are among them illiterates who know not the Book but only lies and they do but conjecture*; “*al-Ummiyy*” (الأمي = one who does not read or write) is related to “*al-umm*” (الأم = mother).

It is as though the excessive love of the mother prevented her from entrusting her child to a teacher to teach and train him; consequently he could learn only from his mother. “*al-Amainiyy*” (الأماني) is plural of “*al-umniyyah*” (الأمنية = lie).

The verse says that some of the Jews were literates who did read and write the book – but making alterations in it; and the rest were illiterates who knew nothing of the book except the lies of the former group.

Qur’an: *Woe, then, to those who write the book with their hands . . .* : “*al-Wayl*” (الويل = woe, disaster, severe punishment, adversity, affliction) ; “*al-ishtira’*” (الإستراء = to sell).

Qur’an: *therefore, woe to them for what their hands have written . . .* : The pronouns may refer either to all Jews or only to the interpolators among them. If the former view is taken then the woe and condemnation would cover the illiterates too.

Qur’an: *Yea! whoever earns evil and his sins beset him on every side. . .* “*al-Khatā’ah*” (الخطيئة = translated here as “sins”) actually refers to the psychical condition resulting from evil-doing. That is why the verse speaks first of his evil-doing and then of the effects of the sins besetting him on every side. When he is beset by his sins on every side, there should remain no opening for the guidance to reach him; he, therefore, will go to Hell and abide there forever.

Had there been an iota of faith in his heart, or some good traits like justice in his character, it would have been possible for the rays of guidance to penetrate to him. The overwhelming besetting of sins on every side, therefore, is possible in case of polytheism, as Allah says:

Surely Allah does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, and forgives what is besides that to whomsoever He pleases (4:48);

and also in case of disbelief and denial of the divine signs, Allah says:

And (as to) those who disbelieve in and belie Our signs, they are the inmates of the Fire, in it they shall abide (2:39).

In short, the earning of evil and being beset by sins on all sides is a broad expression covering all that would make one to abide in the Hell forever.

The two verses under discussion are almost similar to the verse:

Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabaeans, whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does good, they shall have their reward . . . (2:62).

Both show that the basis of salvation and eternal happiness is the true belief and good deeds. The only difference between the two sets of the verses is that the verse 2:62 shows that mere taking to oneself nomenclatures like the Muslim, the Jew etc. is of no use; while the verses under discussion show that mere claiming of salvation is of no worth at all.

Tradition

al-Baqir (a.s.) said about the words of Allah, ***And when they meet those who believe . . . :*** "Some of the Jews (who were not inimical to the Muslims and were not a party to the Jewish conspiracy against them), on meeting the Muslims, used to narrate what the Torah contained of the description of Muhammad (s.a.w.a.); so their elders forbade them to do so and said:

'Do not inform them of what the Torah contains of the attributes of Muhammad (s.a.w.a.), lest they argue with you by that before your Lord.' Thereupon, this verse was revealed."¹

It is narrated from the fifth or the sixth Imam that he said about the words of Allah, Yea! ***whoever earns evil . . .*** "If they deny the *wilayah* (الولاية = friendship, overlordship) of the Leader of the faithful, then they are the inmates of the Fire, in it they shall abide."²

The author says: ash-Shaykh at-Tūsī has narrated in his *al-Amāl* a tradition of nearly the same theme. The two Tradition are based on the principle of the "flow" of the Qur'an and fit the verse on one of its best example. Allah has counted the love of, and submission to, the Prophet's family-members as a good deed, as He says:

Say: "I do not ask of you any recompense for it except the love for (my) near relatives; and whoever earns good, We give him more of good therein (42:23).

Also, the tradition may be taken as another explanation of the verse, as we shall describe in the Chapter 6 (The Table) that "the good" means complying with the demands of the belief of monotheism. If so,

then the tradition particularly mentions `Alؑ (a.s.) because he was the first of this *ummah* to open this door.

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1. Majma `u'l-bayan
 2. al- Kafi

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