

Suratul Baqarah: Verses 83-88

(٨٣) وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ لَا تَعْبُدُونَ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَبِالْوَالِدَيْنِ إِحْسَانًا وَذِي
الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينِ وَقُولُوا لِلنَّاسِ حُسْنًا وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ ثُمَّ
تَوَلَّيْتُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا مِّنْكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ مُّعْرِضُونَ

(٨٤) وَإِذْ أَخَذْنَا مِيثَاقَكُمْ لَا تَسْفِكُونَ دِمَاءَكُمْ وَلَا تُخْرِجُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ مِّنْ دِيَارِكُمْ ثُمَّ
أَقْرَرْتُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ تَشْهَدُونَ

(٨٥) ثُمَّ أَنْتُمْ هَؤُلَاءِ تَقْتُلُونَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَتُخْرِجُونَ فَرِيقًا مِّنْكُمْ مِّنْ دِيَارِهِمْ تَظَاهِرُونَ
عَلَيْهِمْ بِالْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ وَإِن يَأْتُوكُمْ أُسَارَىٰ تُفَادُوهُمْ وَهُوَ مُحْرَمٌ عَلَيْكُمْ إِخْرَاجُهُمْ
أَفْتُومِنُونَ بَعْضُ الْكِتَابِ وَتَكْفُرُونَ بِبَعْضٍ فَمَا جَزَاءُ مَنْ يَفْعَلُ ذَلِكَ مِنْكُمْ إِلَّا
خِزْيٌ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يُرَدُّونَ إِلَىٰ أَشَدِّ الْعَذَابِ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا
تَعْمَلُونَ

(٨٦) أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرُوا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا بِالْآخِرَةِ فَلَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمْ الْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ
يُنصَرُونَ

(٨٧) وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ وَقَفَّيْنَا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ بِالرُّسُلِ وَآتَيْنَا عِيسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ
الْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَيَّدْنَاهُ بِرُوحِ الْقُدُسِ أَفَكُلَّمَا جَاءَكُمْ رَسُولٌ بِمَا لَا تَهْوَى أَنْفُسُكُمْ اسْتَكْبَرْتُمْ
فَفَرِّقُوا كَذِبْتُمْ وَفَرِّقًا تَقْتُلُونَ

(٨٨) وَقَالُوا قُلُوبُنَا غُلْفٌ بَلْ لَعَنَهُمُ اللَّهُ بِكُفْرِهِمْ فَقَلِيلًا مَّا يُؤْمِنُونَ

And when We made a covenant with the Children of Israel: “You shall not worship (any) but Allah and (you shall do) good to (your) parents, and to the near of kin and to the orphans and the needy, and speak to men good (words) and keep up prayer and pay the zakat. ” Then you turned back except a few of you and (now too) you turn aside (83).

And when We made a covenant with you: “You shall not shed your blood and you shall not turn your people out of your cities;” then you gave a promise while you witnessed (84).

Yet you it is who slay your people and turn a party from among you out of their homes, backing each other up against them unlawfully and exceeding the limits; and if they should come to you as captives, you would ransom them – while their very turning out was unlawful for you. Do you then believe in a part of the Book and disbelieve in the other? What then is the reward of such among you as do this but disgrace in the life of this world, and on the Day of Resurrection they shall be sent back to the most grievous chastisement, and Allah is not at all heedless of what you do (85).

These are they who have bought the life of this world for the hereafter, so their chastisement shall not be lightened nor shall they be helped (86).

And most certainly We gave Musa the Book and We sent apostles after him one after another; and We gave `Isa, the son of Maryam, clear evidence and strengthened him with the holy spirit. What! whenever then an apostle came to you with that which your souls did not desire, you were insolent, so you called some (of them) liars and some you slew (87).

And they say: “Our hearts are covered.” Nay, Allah has cursed them on account of their unbelief – so little it is that they believe (88).

Commentary

Qur’an: And when We made a covenant with the Children of Israel: “You shall not worship (any) but Allah. . . ”: To begin with, the verse refers to the Children of Israel in third person, and then ends by

addressing them in second person,

“Then you turned back . . . ” The first sentence mentions making a covenant with them – which must naturally be in words – then describes that covenant; this in its turn begins with a declarative sentence, “You shall not worship (any) but Allah”, and ends up with some imperative ones, “and speak to men good words . . .”

When the stories of the Israelites began, they were addressed in second person, because the verses contained a lot of admonition and reprimand; it continued to the story of the Cow when, because of demands of eloquence, it was changed to third person. Consequently, this verse too began with third person, but when time came to quote the verbal covenant, the style reverted to the second person.

“You shall not worship (any) but Allah”: It is a prohibition in the form of information. This style shows the utmost importance attached to the ban by the speaker – it is as though the speaker has no doubt whatsoever that the order shall be complied with, and that, in this case, the servants will not dare to go near idolatry.

The same style is continued in the next clause, “and (you shall do) good to (your) parents, and to the near of kin and to the orphans and the needy.”

The change over to second person, although resorted to for the purpose of quoting the covenant, has put the speech back to the original style and has linked the last clauses of the covenant to the fresh admonitory ones: “and keep up prayer and pay the *zakat*. Then you turned back . . .”

Qur’an: *and (you shall do) good to (your) parents . . .* As translated here, it is a declarative sentence with the sense of imperative. It may also be translated as an imperative sentence: “and (do) good . . .” The verse gives in descending order of importance, the list of those whom one should do good to.

The parents are the root of man's existence, and nearest of all to him. Then come the near of kin. Going outside the circle of relatives, the orphans are most deserving of kindness and beneficence, because in their small age they are deprived of their father – their guardian, protector and bread-earner. Other needy persons come after them.

Qur’an: “*And to the orphans*”: “*al-Yatīm*” (اليتيم = orphan) is he whose father has died. The word is not used for him who has lost his mother. Also, it is said that a human child is called “orphan” if his father dies, but in animals, the adjective is used for one whose mother dies.

Qur’an: “*And the needy*”: “*al-Masākīn*” (المساكين) is plural of *al-miskīn* (المسكين = needy, impoverished, destitute, lowly).

Qur’an: “*and speak to men good (words)*”: “*Husnan*” (حَسَنًا = beauty, excellence) is an infinitive verb, used for adjective (beautiful, excellent, good) to give emphasis. Some reciters have recited it *hasanan* (حَسَنًا = beautiful, excellent, good).

However, the sentence enjoins them to speak nicely to the people; it is an indirect way of ordering them to maintain good social relations to behave with people nicely, gently and good-manneredly – no matter whether the opposite party is a believer or an unbeliever.

It cannot be said to be abrogated by the verse of fighting, because the two verses are not contradictory to each other; the place and time of social contact is other than the place and time of fighting. For example, using hard words when admonishing a child to correct his behaviour is not contrary to maintaining good social relation.

Qur'an: "You shall not shed your blood. . . .": This too is a prohibitory order, in the form of an information – the same style which was used in, "**You shall not worship (any) but Allah**". "as-safk" (السَّفْكُ = to shed blood).

Qur'an: backing each other up against them: "at-Tazahur" (التَّظَاهُرُ = to help each other). Az-Zah^{ur} (الظَّهِيرُ = helper); it is derived from az-zahr (الظَّهْرُ = back) as though the helper strengthens the back of the helped one.

Qur'an: while their very turning away was unlawful for you: Its literal translation will be, 'while it was unlawful for you their very turning out.' The pronoun "it" is not related here to any previously mentioned noun etc., it is a pronoun used to begin a sentence. In the verse,

Say: "He, Allah is one" (112:1),

the pronoun "He" has the same grammatical significance.

Qur'an: Do you believe in a part of the Book: Why should you follow the rule of paying ransom for them and disobey the prohibition of turning them out? Are not both rules in the same book? Do you believe in a part of the Book and disbelieve in the other?

Qur'an: And We sent apostles after him one after another: "at -Taqfiyah" (التَّقْفِيَّةُ = to send someone after someone else).

Qur'an: and We gave Isa son of Maryam, clear evidence: This subject will be dealt with in Chapter 3, (The Family of `Imran).

Qur'an: And they say: "Our hearts are covered": al-Ghulf " (الْغُلْفُ) is plural of al-aghlaf. It is derived from ghilaf (الْغِلَافُ = cover). They say: Our hearts are protected under various covers and veils – your call cannot reach our hearts. The sentence has the same import as the verse:

And they say: "Our hearts are under coverings from that to which you call us (41:5).

Tradition

Abu Ja'far (a.s.) said about the words of Allah, **and speak to men good** (words): "Speak to men the best of that which you would like to be said about yourself."¹

As-Sadiq (a.s.) said about this verse: "Speak to men, and do not speak but good until you know what it is."

"al-Baqir (a.s.) said: "Speak to men the best, of that which you would like to be said about yourself; for certainly Allah, Mighty and Great is He, dislikes an abuser, curler, speaker of evil against the believers, indecent, shameless (and) begger, and He loves the modest, mild-tempered, chaste (and) moderate."²

The author says: A tradition, similar to the first one, has been narrated in al-Kaf³ from as-Sadiq (a.s.) with another chain of narrators; and similarly in al-`Ayyash⁴.

Another tradition, like the second one has been written from the same Imam in al-Kaf⁵; and one like the third is narrated from al-Baqir (a.s.) in al-`Ayyash⁶. Apparently these meanings of the "good word" have been inferred from general usage.

As-Sadiq (a.s.) said: "Verily Allah sent Muhammad (s.a.w.a.) with five swords: So (there is) a sword against a *dhimm*⁷ (الذمي = free non-Muslim subject of an Islamic country). Allah said: *and speak to men good* (words); it was revealed about the *dhimm*⁸s, then it was abrogated by another verse,

Fight those who do not believe in Allah. . . (9:29)³

The author says: In this tradition the Imam has taken the "speech" to mean behaviour. We say: Do not speak to him but good; what we mean is: Do not deal with him but in a good and decent manner. This meaning will apply only if we take the word, "abrogated" in its terminological sense. But it may also be taken in its literal sense (as we shall explain under the verse:

Whatever signs We abrogate or cause to be forgotten (2:106);

and in that case this verse will not be in conflict with that of the fighting. It should be pointed out that such uses of words in their literal meanings (as against their terminological ones) are not infrequent in the Tradition of the Imams.

1. al-Kafi

2. Ma`ani 'l-akhbar

3. al-`Ayyash⁹

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