

Suratul Baqarah: Verses 104 – 105

(١٠٤) يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَقُولُوا رَءَاؤُنَا وَقُولُوا أَنظِرْ ءَنَا وَأَسْمِعُوا؟ وَاللَّكْفَرِينَ
عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

(١٠٥) مَا يَوَدُّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ ءَأَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَلَا الْمُشْرِكِينَ أَنْ يُنَزَّلَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْ
خَيْرٍ؟ مِّنْ رَبِّكُمْ؟ وَاللَّهُ يَخْتَصُّ بِرَحْمَتِهِ مَن يَشَاءُ؟ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيمِ

O you who believe! do not say, “Have regard for us”, and say, “Wait for us”; and listen; and for the unbelievers there is a painful chastisement (104).

Those who disbelieve from among the People of the Book do not like, nor do the poly-theists, that any good should be sent down to you from your Lord; and Allah chooses especially whom He pleases for His mercy, and Allah is the Lord of mighty grace (105).

Commentary

Qur'an: O you who believe!: It is the first place in the Qur'an where the believers have been addressed in this way, “O you who believe!” This mode of address has been used in some eighty-five places in the Qur'an.¹

Addressing the believers as “O you who believe!”, or describing them as “those who believe”, is a special distinction accorded to this *ummah*. Otherwise, the previous nations are variously described as “the people” (e.g., “*the People of Nuh*, and, “*the People of Hud*”; ‘*He said: ‘O my people! have you considered if I have a clear proof from my Lord... ’*” [11: 88]); and “*the dwellers*” (e.g., “*the dwellers of Madyan*”, “*the dwellers of the Rass*”); and “*the children*” (e.g., “*the Children of Israel*”, “*O Children of Israel!*”). The epithet, “those who believe”, is, therefore, a mark of honour awarded to

the believers of this *ummah*.

It appears from deep meditation of the Qur'an that the import of the words, "those who believe", is somewhat different from that of the words, "the believers". (For an example of the latter, see the verse: ***and turn to Allah all of you, O believers!*** [24:31]).

Allah says in the Qur'an:

Those who bear the throne and those around it celebrate the praise of their Lord and believe in Him and ask forgiveness for those who believe: "Our Lord! Thou embracest all things in mercy and knowledge, therefore grant forgiveness to those who turn (to Thee) and follow Thy way, and save them from the punishment of the hell. Our Lord! and make them enter the gardens of perpetuity which Thou hast promised to them and those who do good of their fathers and their wives and their offsprings, surely Thou are the Mighty, the Wise" (40:7–8).

It shows that the angels and the bearers of the throne ask forgiveness for "those who believe"; then the same group has been referred to as "those who turn (to Thee) and follow Thy way". ("turn" actually means, return.) The prayer continues to "make them (i.e., those who believe) enter the garden" and then joins to them the doers of good from among "their fathers and their wives and their offspring."

If the epithet, "those who believe", were to include all those who believed in the Apostle of Allah (S) irrespective of the quality of their belief, then it would have covered their fathers, wives and children as well (who do good); and there would have been no need to mention them separately; all would have equally benefited from the prayer for those who believe.

Also, have a look at the verse:

And (as for) those who believe and their offspring follow them in faith, We will unite with them their offspring and We will not diminish to them aught of their work; every man is responsible for what he has wrought (52:21):

If the offspring who followed them in faith, were included in the epithet, "those who believe", there would be no sense in saying that the offspring would be united with them.

Even if we were to say that the verse refers to the generation after generation of the believers, that every succeeding generation will be united to the preceding one (provided both believed in the Apostle of Allah – S), the meaning would not seem very proper in the context. If that were the import of the verse, then why this "uniting"?

Also, what purpose would be served by the sentence, "and We will not diminish to them aught of their work"? Such an interpretation may prove correct for one generation only, that is, the last one before the Day of Resurrection – that they would be united with the preceding generation. But nobody has suggested this meaning as it goes clearly against the context. What such an interpretation would boil

down to is as follows:

All the believers are united, one of them being from another; all of them are of one rank; none has any excellence over the others; nor has an earlier believer any superiority over the later ones; their main qualification is the true belief, and all of them are equal in it.

Such a meaning would not fit the wording of the verse which clearly shows that the preceding believers have a sort of superiority over their offspring, who would be raised to the rank of their progenitor as a token of honour to the latter.

The phrase, “and their offspring follow them in faith”, proves that the preceding word, “those who believe” refers to a particular group of the believers – the foremost and the first of the Emigrants and the Helpers who followed the Apostle in the hour of straitness. The epithet, those who believe, is a title of honour bestowed on that distinguished group.

Other two verses too point to this fact:

(It is) ***for the poor who fled... and those who made their abode in the city and in the faith before them... and those who came after them say: “Our Lord! forgive us and those of our brethren who had precedence of us in faith, and do not create any spite in our hearts towards those who believe; our Lord! surely Thou art Kind, Merciful”*** (59:8–10).

This verse uses two phrases, “who had precedence of us in faith”, and “those who believe”. If the import of both were the same, a pronoun would have looked better in place of the second phrase. By not using a pronoun, Allah has made it clear that each phrase has its own significance.

Muhammad is the Apostle of Allah; and those with him are severe against the unbelievers, compassionate among themselves, you will see them bowing down, prostrating themselves, seeking grace from Allah and pleasure;... Allah has promised those among them who believe and do good, forgiveness and a great reward (48:29).

All this shows that the phrase, “those who believe”, is a title of honour, reserved for the first and foremost of the believers. Most probably, the opposite phrase, “those who disbelieve”, has the contrasting significance, and refers to the polytheists of Mecca and others who were the first and foremost of those who disbelieved in the Apostle of Allah (S). For example,

Surely those who disbelieve alike is to them whether you warn them or do not warn them, they will not believe. (2:6)

Objection: This interpretation means that when the Qur'an says, “O you who believe!”, it addresses a special group that was present in the Prophet's time, to the exclusion of all other believers. But all the Muslims agree that such verses are general in their import and that what is said therein applies to all the believers, whether they were present in the Prophet's days or not; and that this mode of address

includes all the believers – in reality, not metaphorically.

Reply: Yes! It is a title of honour, reserved for a selected few. But it does not mean that what is said in those verses is in any way restricted to those few. Whatever order or prohibition is given in such verses is general and applies to all the believers. The matter of legislation – whether a given order is general or exclusive – is quite different from that of a speech – whether it is addressed to all the believers or to a few of them.

Also, it makes no difference whether a verse ordaining a law is addressed to the believers (***O you who believe!***) or to the Prophet in person (***O Prophet!; O Apostle!***), or is revealed without any address at all.

The ordained law in all these cases is applicable to all the Muslims, and covers all the believers; although the verse may be addressed to the Prophet or to those who believe as a mark of respect to him or them.

Nevertheless, one should not indiscriminately interpret the phrase, “O you who believe!” and “those who believe”, as referring to the first and foremost believers of the Prophet's time; rather one should look at the context, before deciding the true connotation of these phrases in a given verse.

For example, look at the verse:

Surely (as for) ***those who believe then disbelieve, again believe and disbelieve, then increase in disbelief, Allah will not forgive them nor guide them in the*** (right) ***path*** (4:137);

and the verse which quotes Nuh (a. s.) as saying:

and I am not going to drive away those who believe; surely they shall meet their Lord (11:29).

Obviously, the phrase, those who believe, used in the above verses cannot refer to the above-mentioned group.

Qur'an: do not say, “Have regard for us”, and say, “Wait for us”; and listen: That is, use the phrase, Wait for us, instead of saying, Have regard for us. And if you failed to comply with this command, it would be tantamount to disbelief, and for the disbelievers there is a painful chastisement. It is a very strong admonition against saying, “*ra'ina*” (رَاعِنَا) = Have regard for us).

This phrase has also been mentioned in another verse, which gives an indication of its connotation:

Of those who are Jews (there are those who) ***alter words from their places and say: “We have heard and we disobey”; and: “Hear, may you not be made to hear!” and “ra'ina”, distorting*** (the word) ***with their tongues and taunting about religion*** (4:46).

Obviously, the Jews used the phrase, “*Ra'ina*” for something similar to the phrase, “Hear, may you not

be made to hear!” And that is why such a mode of addressing the Prophet was prohibited. This explanation agrees with what the tradition says: When the Prophet talked with the Muslims, they used to tell him: “*Ra’ina* (have regard for us)

O Apostle of Allah!” – that is, wait for us, so that we may properly understand what you are saying.² But this word carried a connotation of abuse in the Jews' language. The Jews seized upon this opportunity, addressing the Prophet with this phrase, pretending to show respect to him while their intention was nothing short of abuse. And in their usage it meant, “Hear, may you not be made to hear”.

Thereupon, Allah revealed:

Of those who are Jews (there are those who) ***alter words from their places and say: “We have heard and we disobey”; and: “Hear, may you not be made to hear!” and: “ra’ina ”, distorting*** (the word) ***with their tongues and taunting about religion; and if they had said*** (instead): ***“We have heard and we obey”, and “hearken”, and “onzurna”*** (wait for us), ***it would have been better for them and more upright*** (4:46).

The believers too were told not to use this phrase and say instead, “*onzurna* ”; the Qur'an guided them: “do not say, 'Have regard for us', and say, 'Wait for us' ”.

Qur’an: and for the unbelievers there is a painful chastisement: that is, for those who disobey this rule. It is one of the occasions when disobedience of a law of religion has been termed as disbelief.

Qur’an: Those who disbelieve from among the People of the Book...: Obviously, the phrase, “the People of the Book”, refers here exclusively to the Jews, because the preceding verses too dealt with them. If so, then the phrase would serve as a pointer to the cause why they did not like that any good should be sent down to the believers from their Lord.

The Jews were given a Book before and they were not happy when the Qur'an was sent down to the Muslims, as it deprived them of their distinction as being the People of the Book. They showed avarice about a thing they did not own; they wanted to stand against Allah when He bestowed His mercy and grace on His servants; “and Allah chooses especially whom He pleases for His mercy; and Allah is the Lord of mighty grace”.

On the other hand the phrase, as used in this verse, may include all the People of the Book – the Jews and the Christians both. If so, then the verse would serve to widen the scope of the admonition; it would be a generalization after exclusiveness. Both groups shared many characteristics – and especially their enmity to Islam. Some verses coming afterwards strengthen this interpretation. For example:

And they say: “None shall enter the garden except he who is a Jew or a Christian” (2:111);

And the Jews say, “The Christians do not follow anything (good)”, ***and the Christians say, “The Jews do not follow any-thing*** (good)”... (2:113)

Traditions

Abu Nu'aym has narrated in *Hilyatu 'l-awliya'* from Ibn 'Abbas that he said: “The Apostle of Allah (S) said: 'Allah has not revealed any verse (beginning) with, “O you who believe!” but that 'Ali is its head and leader.’ ” (**ad-Durru 'l-manthur**)

The author says: This tradition supports what we shall be quoting in various places that a certain verse was revealed about 'Ali (a.s.) or *Ahlu 'l-bayt*; for example:

You are the best of the nations raised for (the benefit of) ***men*** (3: 110);

... that you may be witnesses over the people... (2: 143);

... and be with the true ones (9: 119).

1. Eighty-eight, to be exact. Vide al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras, (by Muhammad Fu'ad 'Abdul '1-Baqi). (tr.)

2. It is more or less equivalent to the English idiom “I beg your pardon”. But with a slight change of accent it may come to mean, stupid or cattle tenderer. (tr.)

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