

The Tolerance and Forgiveness of the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad (2)

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 6 November 2020

وَدَّ كَثِيرٌ مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَوْ يَرُدُّونَكُمْ مِن بَعْدِ إِيمَانِكُمْ كُفَّارًا ۗ حَسَدًا مِّنْ عِنْدِ أَنفُسِهِمْ مِّنْ بَعْدِ
مَا تَبَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الْحَقُّ ۖ فَاعْفُوا وَاصْفَحُوا حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِيَ اللَّهُ بِأَمْرِهِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٠٩﴾

“Many of the People of the Book wish that they could turn you (O Muslims) back into disbelievers after you have believed, out of envy from themselves, after truth has become clear to them. **But pardon and forgive**, till Allah bring about His command. Surely Allah is Powerful over all things.” — (2:109)

I am continuing the subject of last week’s *khutba*. The People of the Book are followers of the earlier scriptures. This expression refers usually to the Jews and the Christians. While the idolater opponents of Islam, led by the Quraish, were using force to stop people from embracing or practising Islam, the “People of the Book” of that time in Arabia were not in a position to use force in the same way. So they tried verbal means of turning Muslims away from their new religion, the religion of which the followers of the earlier religions were jealous because it was showing up their errors of belief and deeds. The new religion was also attracting the followers of these religions to itself, thus reducing their numbers and the power of their established priests.

Muslims are here directed to “pardon and forgive” the Jews and the Christians for their efforts to make Muslims renounce Islam. But what is the meaning of the next words: “... till Allah bring about His command (*His amr*)”? Does it mean that the instruction to “pardon and forgive” will change at some future point by the command of Allah? What the coming of the command of Allah means is the coming of the situation when the truth of Islam has become established and its success is clear to everyone. The Quran says in another place:

فَإِذَا جَاءَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ قُضِيَ بِالْحَقِّ وَخَسِرَ هُنَالِكَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

“So when Allah’s command comes, judgment is given with truth, and those who treat (it) as a lie are lost.” — ch. 40, v. 78

When, by the command of Allah, Islam is triumphant in the land, the desire of the opponents of Islam to “turn you back into disbelievers after you have believed” will cease to exist as a threat to the Muslims. So many people will have embraced Islam, including former opponents who used to try to make Muslims leave Islam, that there will be no one left trying to turn Muslims back into unbelievers. And if any such opponents do still remain, their efforts should not bother Muslims at all in view of the triumph of Islam. So the words “pardon and forgive, till Allah bring about His command” mean that you should pardon and forgive these opponents of Islam until the promised time comes when you don’t need to decide whether to forgive or not because their actions will either have ceased or will no longer harm you.

There is a hadith in Bukhari (no. 4566) mentioning the above verse, and it says:

“The Messenger of Allah and his Companions used to forgive the idolaters and the People of the Book, as Allah had commanded them, and they used to show patience on hearing hurtful words.”

It goes on to say: “The Prophet used to adhere to forgiveness as Allah had commanded him to do, until Allah gave permission [to fight] regarding them. So the Messenger of Allah fought them at Badr, and through him Allah killed the leaders of the disbelieving Quraish...”. It then adds that, seeing the Muslim victory, many of the idolaters embraced Islam.

It should be remembered that the reason why Allah gave permission to Muslim to fight was not that these opponents were uttering hurtful words against the Holy Prophet and Islam but because they had raised an army to fight and destroy the Muslims. When the Muslims won the battle in which they were very much weaker than their enemy, some of their opponents recognised it as a sign of the truth of Islam. So the command of Allah came, but till that point it came only partly. History shows

that neither the Holy Prophet nor his followers thought that, as the command of Allah has come, therefore the instruction to “pardon and forgive” no longer applies. After being victorious in the battle of Badr, the Holy Prophet still exercised forgiveness. As I covered in detail in an earlier *khutba*, one of those captured in that battle was Suhail ibn Amr, a leading opponent of the Holy Prophet who had a talent for making speeches and he had employed this skill in making speeches against the Holy Prophet. Hazrat Umar suggested to the Holy Prophet that Suhail’s teeth should be pulled out “so that he would never be able to exercise his oratory against you.” The Holy Prophet rejected this without hesitation and said: “Certainly not. I will not mutilate anyone, for God would mutilate me even though I am His Prophet.”

Again, after this, when the Holy Prophet and his followers conquered Makkah and held their enemies in their power, he forgave all those who had been abusing Islam and Muslims in all kinds of ways. The command to “pardon and forgive” those who abuse verbally continued to apply and continues to apply forever.

There is a passage in the Quran as follows:

“O Prophet, surely We have sent you as a witness, and a bearer of good news and a warner, and as an inviter to Allah by His permission, and as a light-giving sun. And give the believers the good news that they will have great grace from Allah. And do not obey the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and disregard their annoying talk, and rely on Allah. And Allah is sufficient as having charge of affairs.” (33:45–48)

The Holy Prophet came as a witness who could testify to the truth. Having seen it himself as an eye-witness, he can tell people about it. Besides being a bearer of good news for those who accept his message, and a warner to those who reject him, he is an inviter to Allah “by His permission”. His invitation is accepted by someone only if Allah so permits. It is not up to him or to his followers to make anyone accept his invitation, or to feel dejected and disappointed when his invitation is not accepted. The Holy Prophet is commanded here not to do what the disbelievers and the

hypocrites, i.e. weak-hearted among the Muslims, want him to do. The disbelievers tell him to abandon his mission as being false, while the half-hearted followers tell him not to stand firm on his teachings but to make concessions to his opponents for worldly gain. He must not let their talk cast an influence upon him. He is told to “disregard their annoying talk”. The word used here also means “hurtful talk”, “abuse” and “insult”. Some translators and commentators consider the expression وَدَعْ أَدَاَهُمْ here as meaning “but do not harm them”. He must not take any action in regard to their annoying, hurtful, abusive and insulting talk except to “rely on Allah”, and Allah is described here as “sufficient” or كَافِيَ as the Guardian, the Protector, and the Advocate of the Holy Prophet’s cause.

It is stated in this passage that the Prophet has been sent as a “light-giving sun”, سراجا منيرا . Once the sun has risen, it shows its existence to everyone by itself. It doesn’t need us to tell anyone that the sun is out. Similarly, with the message of the Holy Prophet, once it reaches somewhere it casts its own bright light. The work of the Holy Prophet and his followers was to make his message accessible to the people. They cannot force it upon anyone, nor should they be angry or disheartened if people do not accept it.

As to ignoring abuse, whether from the disbelievers or the hypocrites, there are two incidents from the Holy Prophet’s life that I will relate here. It is reported in Bukhari by someone:

“Once the Messenger of Allah distributed some battle gains among people. A man of the Ansar said, ‘By Allah! Muhammad, by this division, did not intend to please Allah’. So I (the narrator of this report) came to the Messenger of Allah and informed him about it, whereupon his face changed colour with anger and he said: May Allah bestow His mercy on Moses, for he was hurt with more than this, yet he remained patient.” (hadith 6059)

This was a grossly insulting remark, to say that the Holy Prophet had done something for a low, worldly motive instead of seeking the approval of Allah. Hearing this

the Holy Prophet recalled that Moses had been patient under even greater provocation. What he is saying is that it befits him even more than Moses to remain patient.

Another incident is reported in Bukhari (hadith 4351 and 3344) to the effect that once the Holy Prophet divided some wealth among certain of his followers. One of those who didn't get anything said: "We deserve it more than they." Another insulted the Holy Prophet by telling him: "Fear God, O Muhammad." The Holy Prophet said to this second man: "Pity be on you! Of all the people of the world, am I not the one who is most entitled to fear God?" After the man had left, Khalid ibn Walid asked the Holy Prophet's permission to go and kill him. The Holy Prophet replied: "No, Perhaps he says his prayers", meaning that he might nonetheless be a sincere Muslim. Khalid ibn Walid said: "Many people there are who pray, but what they say with their tongues is not what is in their hearts." In other words, the man might not be a Muslim at heart. The Holy Prophet replied to Khalid:

"I have not been commanded (by God) to drill into people's hearts or cut open their bellies to look inside."

Thus the Holy Prophet taught that our opinion of a person's beliefs should be based on what we see of his words and his actions visibly. We, **as human beings**, are not entitled to claim that what is in his heart is the opposite of his words and actions. **Only Allah** can know what is in a person's heart and judge accordingly. It is on this principle that the teaching of Islam is based that if you see a person reciting the *Kalima*, or praying in the manner of Muslims, you must accept and treat him as a Muslim for the laws of this world. You are disallowed from trying to establish what belief he holds in his heart.

بَارَكَ اللهُ لَنَا وَنَاوَكُمُ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعَنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالْآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ،

إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رُؤُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ-