

Last verses of Surah al-Baqarah (ch. 2)

Friday Khutba by Dr Zahid Aziz, for Lahore Ahmadiyya UK, 4 March 2022

بِاللَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَمَا فِي الْاَرْضِ ۗ وَاِنْ تُبَدَّلُوْا مَا فِىْ اَنْفُسِكُمْ اَوْ تَخْفٰوْهُ يَحْسِبْكُمْ بِهٖ اللّٰهُ ۗ فَيَغْفِرُ لِمَنْ يَّشَآءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَنْ يَّشَآءُ ۗ وَاللّٰهُ عَلٰى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيْرٌ ﴿٢٨٤﴾

“To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth. And whether you manifest what is in your minds or hide it, Allah will call you to account according to it. So He forgives whom He pleases and punishes whom He pleases. And Allah is Powerful over all things.” (The Quran, 2:284)

In the previous three *Khutbas* on the topic of the causes of Islamophobia, I mentioned that one view on Islam commonly expressed by Christian writers is that the Holy Prophet Muhammad, while preaching his message at Makkah before the *Hijra*, was doing this sincerely without any worldly motives, and showing the best moral qualities in his character, but as soon as he arrived in Madinah after the *Hijra* he acquired worldly ambitions of being a ruler and conqueror, and wanted to use religion to satisfy his own personal desires. They allege that from being a persecuted and humble preacher at Makkah, when he moved to Madinah he became a ruthless and brutal ruler as far as treating non-Muslims was concerned.

The opening sentence of the above verse is relevant to answering this allegation. It says God provides guidance both for our spiritual progress and for our physical, earthly lives: “To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth”. Generally, people think that the purpose of a religion is to show them how to enter heaven, how through prayer, fasting, charity etc. they can come closer to God, show good qualities at the individual level, and have spiritual experiences, and then after death they are in heaven with God. They exclude national and communal matters from the scope of religion, such as the administration of justice, running the economy and the state, and war and peace. They treat all these matters as worldly, of the earth. The Christian critics of Islam, whom I mentioned above, have Jesus as their great

model. As long as the Holy Prophet Muhammad remained at Makkah facing conditions similar to what Jesus faced during his entire time of preaching, his Christian critics accept his sincerity. However, Jesus did not have to face the conditions which the Holy Prophet did at Madinah, where he and his followers became a self-governing community, and moreover they had war made upon them by their opponents. There is no example provided by Jesus regarding such situations, so that Christians could look to that example and then assess the Holy Prophet accordingly.

The only example in the Bible of a community established by God which had an organised state with its own laws, and was involved in relations with other nations, and in war and peace with them, is that of the Israelites, starting with Moses and continuing to David and Solomon. But their system of law, based on the teachings of Moses, could not be applied permanently or universally, particularly because it was so harsh against other nations. So the Christian societies came to believe that such worldly matters fall outside the scope of being regulated by religious teachings, and the only way of handling these matters is to use any kind of method, fair or foul, and unscrupulous means for your self-interest, because that is how the world works.

The Quran contradicts this by saying that whether it is matters related to the next world or to this world, God has provided guidance and moral values for both. I will now refer to some words from the famous Lord's Prayer of the Christians, which has the same importance in the Christian religion as the *Surah Fatihah* does in Islam. It was taught by Jesus himself. Addressing God, the following two lines occur in it: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." In this prayer, the person praying looks forward to the coming of God's kingdom, and when it comes then God's will shall be done on earth as it is done in heaven. This, I think, is the same as the opening words of the verse of the Quran that I am discussing: "To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth." On earth, man has the opportunity to go against God's will. You can say that in the next life it is only God's will which prevails and man cannot go against it. Even on earth, as regards the natural phenomena that we see around us, such as the weather, the seas, the sun and the moon, it is God's will which prevails. But human beings, in their dealings with

each other, put their self-interest above everything else and they employ all kinds of methods, including deceit, falsehood, usurping others' rights, etc. to get what they desire. They in fact believe that there is no other way to succeed in the world in material terms, except by such unscrupulous methods. But the Quran came with the teaching to show how God's will can be done on earth, how in business dealings, in politics, in international relations, there can be a moral framework in which to work.

There are other ways of looking at the words: "To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth." There are some religions, and also movements within religions, which consider spiritual exercises to be all-important and as being all that you need to do. They are not concerned with anything in the world outside their spiritual practices. For example, there are Muslim movements, which also existed before and at the time of Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, which teach that all a Muslim needs to involve himself in is the remembrance of Allah and chanting various formulae and performing various rituals, and this brings him closer to God. In the time of the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Movement, when Islam was under heavy criticism from certain other religions and at the same time modern philosophies and outlooks were weakening faith in religion, these spiritual movement were unconcerned to meet these external challenges. They wanted Muslims to live cut-off from the ideas arising in the world. At the opposite end, there were Muslim groups who undervalued the religious practices of Islam and believed that for Muslims to progress they needed to follow and copy the modern Western civilisation. One side was concerning itself with the heavens only and the other side with the earth only. But God says here that both belong to Him. Muslims should concern themselves with both.

The verse goes on to say: "And whether you manifest what is in your minds or hide it, Allah will call you to account according to it." The word translated as "minds" here is the word for the soul or self — *anfusi-kum*, "your souls". The heavens and the earth that have been mentioned in this verse are visible to everyone, but "what is in your minds", or souls, is not visible to anyone else but God. What is inside our minds or souls can be manifested in our actions and deeds, or it can merely remain inside us as thoughts or intentions. It says here that God assesses a person by what is in his

heart and mind. When a person does a good deed, whether it is prayer, fasting, charity or some good deed towards other people, God values it by what was in his heart. It is generally thought that the religious practices of Islam, such as prayer and fasting, are meant only as mechanical rituals, not involving any feeling or attraction in the heart, and are to be shown by an individual to the whole Muslim community, that he or she is performing them. But this verse contradicts any such idea. It says that, regardless of whether your action was open and manifested and known to others, or it was hidden from view, God will call you to account according to what was in your mind.

The “hiding” mentioned here may not only refer to a person’s actual deeds which he did out of people’s view; for example, his private prayers or giving charity secretly. It may also mean something he did not do, while intending in his heart to do it. In that sense, the words “whether you *manifest* what is in your minds or *hide* it” mean the intentions which you put into actual practice and the intentions which, for various reasons, you could not carry out in practice. A person may fully have intended to do some good deed, that is what is in his mind, but he was prevented from doing it by some circumstance. That is still counted in his favour by God. A person may have the full intention to commit a misdeed, but some external circumstance, something outside his control, prevents him from doing it. God still holds him accountable for that intention. However, God is Merciful. So in case of someone who intended to do a good deed, but was prevented, he still has a reward with God. But in case of someone who intended to do a bad deed, but was prevented, he does not incur any punishment. The Quran tells us: “Whoever brings good, he will have better than it; and whoever brings evil, those who do evil will be recompensed only for what they did” (28:84). It is repeated several times in the Quran that those who do evil will suffer punishment *only for what they did*, only for the deeds they actually committed, and not for their unfulfilled intentions. And it is also stated, as here, that those who do good receive a return better than it, not only for the good deeds they actually did, but also for their unfulfilled intentions of doing good.

Lastly, the verse says: “So He forgives whom He pleases and punishes whom He pleases.” Here, “whom he pleases” does not mean that God decides to forgive or

punish someone for no reason and without any principle, like an inconsistent person who does something just because he feels like it. What it means is that while we, as human beings, may be sure that a certain person will be forgiven and another will be punished, but God in His infinite knowledge and Mercy may do the opposite. We can only know and teach the *ways* which lead to forgiveness and those which lead to punishment. But we cannot know who has truly acted on them and who has not.

May Allah enable us to continue studying His word and gaining more and more light and guidance from it, ameen.

بَارَكَ اللهُ لَنَا وَنَاوَكُمُ فِي الْقُرْآنِ الْعَظِيمِ، وَنَفَعَنَا وَإِيَّاكُمْ بِالآيَاتِ وَالذِّكْرِ الْحَكِيمِ، إِنَّهُ تَعَالَى جَوَادٌ كَرِيمٌ
مَلِكٌ بَرٌّ رَوْوْفٌ رَحِيمٌ-