



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The Dangers of Selective “Obedience” to Allah

We are living in an age where many people are engaging with religious material in a very limited way. This, along with the prevalence of religious instructors with limited scope to their knowledge but potentially high reach is contributing to a selective, uncontrolled approach to the religion. This reminds me of the verse in the Quran:

يَأَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا ادْخُلُوا فِي السِّلْمِ كَآفَّةً وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ ۚ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ – سورة البقرة 208

O you who have believed, enter into Islam completely [and perfectly] and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy – Al Quran 2:208.

This verse was revealed when learned Jewish converts wanted to follow the prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings upon him, but keep the Sabbath, even though the Old Testament Sabbath has been repealed by God through the messages of both Christ and Muhammad, peace and blessings upon them both.

Allah sent down this verse as a timeless instruction, that if you are a believer in the message of Muhammad, peace and blessings upon him, then you must embrace every aspect of Islam. A person may or may not be aware that they struggle with this. I have previously spoken to a man who was strongly committed to the necessity of participating in military jihad while he was at the same time continuing to receive tattoos, some of which were religiously inspired¹.

Falling short in certain areas is not inherently problematic. No person is free from shortcomings. We learn to seek forgiveness and strive towards improvement. This should be humbling for everyone. For some however, it causes them to more strenuously hold on to the part of the faith they identify strongly with!

There are numerous risks a person is exposed to when their understanding of the faith is so constrained, including overstressing certain elements of the faith, and overlooking others.

Generally, it results in deviations from the balanced center mentioned in a recent article and deviations from *Al Sirat Al Mustaqim* (the straight path). Unfortunately, the person may continue to identify their behaviour as religious, as it started from a religious place. It however is not so. A good example is how Christians took their love for Prophet Eesa (Christ) to the extent that they elevated

¹ Giving a tattoo and receiving a tattoo are both forbidden in Islam. Receiving religiously inspired tattoos makes the conflicting behaviour very peculiar.

him to the status of divinity. At some point what you are doing is no longer religious and becomes contrary to the teachings of the faith. The same can be said for the *Khawarij*, as the Prophet, peace and blessings upon him, described them with the following:

"يَخْرُجُ فِيكُمْ قَوْمٌ تَحْقِرُونَ صَلَاتَكُمْ مَعَ صَلَاتِهِمْ، وَصِيَامَكُمْ مَعَ صِيَامِهِمْ، وَعَمَلَكُمْ مَعَ عَمَلِهِمْ، وَيَقْرَأُونَ الْقُرْآنَ لَا يُجَاوِزُ حَنَاجِرَهُمْ، يَمْرُقُونَ مِنَ الدِّينِ كَمَا يَمْرُقُ السَّهْمُ مِنَ الرَّمِيَّةِ، يُنْظَرُ فِي النَّصْلِ فَلَا يَرَى شَيْئًا، وَيُنْظَرُ فِي الْقَدْحِ فَلَا يَرَى شَيْئًا، وَيُنْظَرُ فِي الرَّيشِ فَلَا يَرَى شَيْئًا، وَيَنْمَارِي فِي الْفُوقِ". - صحيح البخاري

"There will appear some people among you whose prayer will make you look down upon yours, and whose fasting will make you look down upon yours, and whose actions will make you look down upon yours, but they will recite the Quran with it not going beyond their throats (it will not reach their hearts) and they will go out of Islam as an arrow goes out through the game whereupon the archer would examine the arrowhead but see nothing, and look at the unfletched part of the arrow but see nothing, and look at the arrow feathers but see nothing, and finally he suspects to find something in the lower part of the arrow." – narrated in Sahih Al Bukhari

The *Khawarij* as stated in the *hadith* will perform certain religious acts in a fashion that the rest of us will feel our religious acts are of poor quality in comparison. Yet there is a problem. When they read the Quran, it does not reach their hearts, and does not translate to correct action. The speed at which they travel out of Islam is like the speed at which the arrow travels through the prey. To me this *hadith* clearly shows that the abandonment of religious practice and belief in God is not the only way a person might overstep the boundaries of Allah and leave the tenets of the faith.

The person overcome by his faith

There are some who take matters in the faith too far when they relate to themselves, such as deciding to fast every day, or to donate money to the extent that they leave themselves in difficulty and without adequate food and clothing. This is problematic and people should be reminded that this is not what Allah wants of them. The Prophet, peace and blessings upon him, is reported to have said:

إِنَّ الدِّينَ يُسْرٌ، وَلَنْ يُشَادَّ الدِّينَ أَحَدٌ إِلَّا غَلَبَهُ، فَسَدِّدُوا وَقَارِبُوا وَأَبْشِرُوا، وَاسْتَعِينُوا بِالْعَدْوَةِ وَالرُّوْحَةِ وَشَيْءٍ مِنَ الدَّلْجَةِ - صحيح البخاري.

"The Deen (Islam) is indeed easy, and whoever overburdens himself in his Deen will be overcome (with difficulty). Therefore, aim for balance and what is near to balance and I give you good tidings that you will be rewarded; and gain strength by performing your pious acts in the early parts of the day and during a portion of the night" – Narrated in Sahih Al Bukhari.

The bigger problem is when the matter is relating to the behaviour of another person. We see examples of harm and oppression committed against others and sometimes the perpetrator believes

they are doing the right thing. They believe that it is their duty to bring this difficulty that the Prophet, peace and blessings upon him, warned against upon someone in their life. The following Quranic verse, and *hadith* immediately come to mind when discussing this matter:

((قُلْ هَلْ نُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِالْأَخْسَرِينَ أَعْمَالًا. الَّذِينَ ضَلَّ سَعْيُهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ يُحْسِبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا)) – سورة الكهف 103-104

Say, [O Muhammad], "Shall we inform you of the greatest losers as to [their] deeds? [They are] those whose efforts are in vain in this worldly life, while they think they are doing good!" – Al Quran 18:103-104.

"انْفُوا الظُّلْمَ فَإِنَّ الظُّلْمَ ظَلَمَاتٌ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَانْفُوا الشُّحَّ فَإِنَّ الشُّحَّ أَهْلَكَ مَنْ كَانَ قَبْلَكُمْ حَمَلَهُمْ عَلَى أَنْ سَفَكُوا دِمَاءَهُمْ وَاسْتَحَلُّوا مَحَارِمَهُمْ" - صحيح مسلم

"Beware of committing oppression, for oppression is darkness on the Day of Resurrection, and be on your guard against stinginess for stinginess destroyed those who were before you, as it incited them to shed blood and make lawful what was unlawful for them." – narrated in Sahih Muslim.

The "darkness" mentioned in the *hadith* can be taken *inter-alia* as a metaphor for much difficulty. The consequence of oppression in this life is much difficulty on the day of resurrection.

One prominent example in our community of overstepping boundaries and bringing difficulty upon others is often seen in the area of protecting your family. Protecting your family is an Islamic requirement, and a person who doesn't take measures to protect their family is falling short in their responsibility.

However, both men and women have been known to overstep the boundaries set by Allah when attempting to "protect their family". There are many examples that would illustrate this point, but I will mention here only 2:

- I was informed by a very active woman in our community who runs a women's refuge of a situation where a man's "protectiveness" over his wife reached the extent that he had installed cameras all over the house to monitor her movements while he was away.
- I was approached to help a couple who were separated and going through relationship troubles. They had a young baby between them. The "protectiveness" of the wife over the infant reached the level that she was keeping the child from its father. The husband couldn't imagine taking his wife to court over the matter so he was stuck with this dilemma.

Without going into the details, the husband in the first scenario has overstepped his boundaries and is committing sin as he was, among other things, spying on another person, and we are commanded in the Quran not to spy on others (Al Quran 49:12). In the second scenario the wife overstepped her boundaries and committed sin by, among other things, denying the child the right to its father's nurturing care².

So how can we identify when we are no longer doing what is right? One way is to consider if we are committing a sin by doing what we are doing. The *Khawarij* committed serious harm to their fellow Muslims by doing what they claimed was their religious duty. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I causing the practice of this faith to become difficult and a burden upon this person?
- Am I bringing harm to them?
- If I saw this happen to somebody else whom I care about, would I view it as oppressive?
- What would the respected Sheikhs and elders in my community think about what I am doing?
- Would I be able to stand before Allah, Creator of all and Knower of all my actions, on the day of judgement knowing that I've treated another of His creation in this way?

In our interactions with others we must always be mindful of whether or not we are being oppressive towards them, whether we are wronging them in some way.

Remember the tenets of the faith are easy, so don't overburden others by making it unnecessarily difficult upon them.

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² Please keep in mind I am only mentioning these examples to illustrate my point. This is not a discussion on whether or not their actions in their real-life circumstance constituted a sin, as I have not mentioned the details of their respective situations.