

Letter 106

Rabi' al-Thani 18, 1330

I. Ibn 'Abbas's Argument

1) May I invite your attention to the dialogue between Ibn 'Abbas and 'Umar in which the latter, in a lengthy conversation between both men, asked: "O Ibn 'Abbas! Do you know what stopped your folks [from demanding the caliphate] after Muhammad (S)?" Ibn 'Abbas narrates saying: "I hated to answer 'Umar's question, so I said to him: 'If I do not know, the commander of the faithful [i.e. 'Umar] knows.'" 'Umar said: "[Some people simply] hated that both prophethood and caliphate be confined to your House; so, they were happy about their scheme. Quraysh sought it for themselves, and were able to obtain it." I said: "O commander of the faithful! Do you permit me to say something and promise to control your anger?"

He answered in the affirmative; therefore, Ibn 'Abbas said: "As regarding your statement, O commander of the faithful, that Quraysh sought it for themselves and were successful in obtaining it, I say that had Quraysh sought what Allah had chosen for them, their choice would have been unobjectionable and unblamed. As regarding your statement that they hated to see both prophethood and caliphate in our House, I say that Allah, the Exalted and the Sublime, has described some people to be malicious, saying, '... that is so because they hated what Allah has revealed, so He rendered their deeds vain.'" 'Umar then said: "Impossible, O Ibn 'Abbas, for I heard things about you which I hate to believe else your status in my eyes should be reduced."

I asked: 'What are they, O commander of the faithful? If they are true, they should not lower my status in your esteem, and if they are not, I am capable of defending myself against false charges.'¹ 'Umar then said: 'It has come to my knowledge that you say that they have deprived you of it [caliphate] out of envy, oppression and injustice.'

I said: 'As regarding your statement, O commander of the faithful, that it was oppression, then that has become quite obvious to those who are ignorant as well as to those who are clement. As regarding your statement about envy, then Adam was envied, and we are his descendants who also are envious.'¹ 'Umar

then said: 'Impossible, impossible; your hearts, O descendants of Hashim, have become filled with envy that can never dissipate.'

I therefore said: 'Wait, O commander of the faithful, do not attribute this to the hearts of those whom Allah has purified with a perfect purification.'" [1](#)

He argued with him in another incident, asking: "How did you leave your cousin?" Ibn 'Abbas said he thought 'Umar meant 'Abdullah ibn Ja'far; so, he answered: "I left him in the company of his friends." He said: "I did not mean him; I meant the greatest among you, Ahl al-Bayt." Ibn 'Abbas said: "I left him exiled, irrigating while reciting the Qur'an." 'Umar said: "O 'Abdullah! I implore you not to be shy but tell me if he is still concerned about the issue of caliphate." He answered in the affirmative.

Then 'Umar asked: "Does he claim that the Messenger of Allah (S) has selected him for it?" Ibn 'Abbas answered: "Yes, indeed; moreover, I even asked my father if there was any statement made by the Messenger of Allah regarding selecting him for the caliphate, and my father informed me that that was the truth."

'Umar then said: "The Messenger of Allah held him in very high esteem through his speeches and actions in a way that left no argument nor excuse for anyone, [2](#) and he kept testing the nation regarding him for some time; [3](#) nay, even when he was sick [prior to his demise], he wished to nominate him for it, but it was I who stopped him." [4](#)

In a third dialogue between both men, 'Umar said: "O Ibn 'Abbas! I can see how wronged your friend ['Ali (as)] is." Ibn 'Abbas said: "O commander of the faithful, then affect justice on his behalf." Ibn 'Abbas said: "But 'Umar pulled his hand from mine and went away whispering to himself for a good while.

Then he stopped; so, I rejoined him, and he said to me: 'O Ibn 'Abbas! I do not think that his people denied him [the caliphate] for any reason other than his being too young for it.' I said to him: 'By Allah, neither Allah nor His Messenger regarded him as too young when they both ordered him to take Sūrat Bara'a (Qur'an, Chapter 9) from him [from Abu Bakr].' Having heard this, he turned away from me and started walking fast; so, I left him alone." [5](#)

How often has 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas, who is the scribe of the Muslim nation, the spokesman of the Hashimites, and cousin of the Messenger of Allah (S), encountered such stances? In Letter No. 26, you have come to see how he argues with the oppressive party by citing a tradition that counts ten exclusive merits of 'Ali (as).

It is a lengthy and eminent tradition in which he quotes the Prophet (S) asking his cousins: "Who among you would be my supporter in [matters related to] this life and the life hereafter?" They declined, but 'Ali (as) said: "I support you in this life as well as the life to come." The Prophet (S) then said to 'Ali (as): "You are my *wali* in this life and the life to come."

In another tradition, Ibn ‘Abbas narrates that during the Tabuk raid, the Messenger of Allah (S) went out, accompanied by many people, and ‘Ali (as) asked him: "Shall I accompany you?" The Messenger of Allah denied his request; so, ‘Ali (as) wept; whereupon the Prophet (S) said to him: "Are you not pleased that your status to me is like that of Aaron to Moses, except there is no Prophet (S) after me? I ought not leave except after you represent me in my absence." The Messenger of Allah has also told him: "You are the *wali* of every believer after me," and "Whoever accepts me as his *wali*, ‘Ali (as) [henceforth] is his *mawla*."

II. Arguments of al-Hasan and al-Husayn

2) The dignitaries among the descendants of Hashim often argued likewise. Once al-Hasan ibn ‘Ali (as) came to Abu Bakr who had seated himself on the pulpit of the Messenger of Allah (S) and told him to get down from a place his father was more worthy of. Al-Husayn (as) is reported to have said similarly to ‘Umar who was also seated on the same pulpit.⁶

III. Arguments of Prominent Shi’ah Sahabah

3) Books written by imamites who dealt with this topic cite many incidents wherein the Hashimites and their followers among the *sahabah* and *tabi’in* argued likewise, and they ought to be reviewed by those who are interested in their contents. Suffices here to cite the book of arguments by imam al-Tibrisi in which he quotes statements made by the Omayyad Khalid ibn Sa’id ibn al-’s,⁷ Salman al-Farisi, Abu Tharr al-Ghifari, ‘Ammar ibn Yasir, al-Miqdad, Buraydah al-Aslami, Abul-Haytham ibn al-Tihan, Sahl and ‘Uthman sons of Hanif, Khuzaymah ibn Thabit of the two Shahadas, Ubayy ibn Ka’b, Abu Ayyub al-Ansari, and many others among those who researched the history of Ahl al Bayt and of their followers.

Yet they never missed any opportunity to prove their point by citing explicit or implicit references, strongly or smoothly worded, speeches and writings, poetry and prose, according to whatever their circumstances, though critical, permitted.

IV. Reference to their Applying the Will as an Argument

4) They repeatedly referred to the will, using it as an argument, as is well-known by researchers, Wassalam.

Sincerely,

S

¹ We have quoted it verbatim from Al-Tarikh al-Kamil by Ibn al-Athir who includes it at the conclusion of ‘Umar's biography among the events of the year 23 A.H., page 24, Vol. 3, and it is also quoted by the Mu'tazilite scholar in ‘Umar's biography, too, page 107, Vol. 3, of Sharh Nahjul Balaghah

² He means that the speech of the Messenger of Allah (S) praising ‘Ali indicates that ‘Ali enjoys quite a lofty status,

obviously an admission by 'Umar.

[3.](#) He means that the Prophet (S), due to praising 'Ali in such wise words, is testing the nation to see if it would accept him as his successor.

[4.](#) This is quoted by Imam Abul-Fadl Ahmad ibn Abu Tahir in his book Tarikh Baghdad, indicating his reliable source to be Ibn 'Abbas. It is also quoted by the Mu'tazilite scholar who discusses 'Umar in his Sharh Nahjul Balaghah, page 97, Vol. 3.

[5.](#) This dialogue is quoted by authors of books of biographies in their discussions of 'Umar, and we have quoted it here from Sharh Nahjul Balaghah by the Mu'tazilite scholar; so, refer to page 105 of its third volume.

[6.](#) Ibn Hajar has quoted both cases in his fifth maqsad of the verse enjoining kindness to the Prophet's kin, and it is verse 14, of the ones dealt with in Chapter 11 of his book Al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqa; so, refer to page 160 of this reference. Al-Dar Qutni has quoted the case of al-Hasan with Abu Bakr, and Ibn Sa'd has quoted the case of al-Husayn with 'Umar in his biography of the latter in his Tabaqat.

[7.](#) Khalid ibn Sa'id ibn al-'s was among those who rejected Abu Bakr's caliphate; he refused for three months to swear allegiance to him, as stated by a group of reliable Sunnis such as Ibn Sa'd in his biography of Khalid in his Tabaqat, page 70, Vol. 4, adding that when Abu Bakr dispatched troops to Syria, he prepared the standard for him and came in person to his house, but 'Umar said to Abu Bakr: "Do you give charge to Khalid after having heard what he has said?" He continued trying till he sent Abu 'Arwah al-Dawsi with the message that "The successor of the Messenger of Allah (S) asks you to return our standard." He did so saying: "Your government has never pleased us, nor has your deposition harmed us." Having heard such a statement, Abu Bakr came to him to apologize, and he earnestly requested him not to mention 'Umar in public. All writers who mention the incident of this campaign to Syria mention this incident as well, for it is one of such detailed incidents.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/fr/al-murajaat-abd-al-husayn-sharaf-al-din-al-musawi/letter-106#comment-0>