

Section 3: Slandering Chaste Women

Sura An-Nur – Verse 21

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعْ خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ فَإِنَّهُ
يَأْمُرُ بِالْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَلَوْلَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ مَا زَكَا مِنْكُمْ مِنْ أَحَدٍ
أَبَدًا وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يُزَكِّي مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

21. “O you who believe! Do not follow the steps of the Satan. And whoever follows the steps of the Satan, then verily he commands indecency and wrong. Had it not been Allah’s grace and His mercy on you, not one of you would have ever been pure. But Allah purifies whom He pleases; and Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.”

The Arabic word /xutuwaat/ is the plural form of the word /xutwat/ that means ‘step’. The holy Qur’an has used the phrase /xutuwatiš šaytan/ (‘the footsteps of the Satan’) when it is the matter of calumny and lust, in order to indicate that Satan encourages man step by step to do some sins.

Though these verses do not follow the subject of ’lfi, they complete the content of that matter. It is a warning for all believers that evil thoughts and deeds sometimes penetrate gradually and invisibly.

If they are not controlled and hindered in their first steps, man will get alerted when the die is cast. Thus when the first temptations of spreading lewdness or any sin get manifest, they must be immediately withstood, so that defilement does not get prevalent.

In the first verse, addressing the believers, it says:

“O you who believe! Do not follow the steps of the Satan. And whoever follows the steps of the Satan, then verily he commands indecency and wrong...”

If 'Shaytan' is interpreted into the vast meaning of the word, as any 'ruinous, felonious, cunning creature', the extensiveness of this warning in all dimensions of life becomes clear.

A pure and faithful man can never be all of a sudden involved in corruption, but it is done step by step:

First step: hobnobbing and getting familiar with wicked persons

Second step: attending their parties

Third step: thought of sin

Fourth step: committing questionable examples and errors

Fifth step: committing lesser sins

Finally he will do the worst sins and he is just like a person on whom an offender's yoke is laid and the offender leads him to precipice step by step, so that he falls down and will be ruined. Yes, these are 'the footsteps of the Satan'.¹

Then the verse refers to one of the most important Divine favours and blessings which are bestowed on man in the path of guidance.

It says:

"...Had it not been Allah's grace and His mercy on you, not one of you would have ever been pure. But Allah purifies whom He pleases; and Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing."

Undoubtedly, Divine grace and bless rescue men from defilements, sins and deviations, because He has conferred, on one hand, the gift of intellect and, on the other hand, the grace of the existence of the Prophet (S) and ordinances that have been sent down by revelation.

Moreover, His special help, and supernatural aids that cover deserving, receptive, and apt men are the most important factors of purification and cleanness.

The Qur'anic holy phrase /*man yaša'*/, as we have said repeatedly, does not mean unreasonable will and desire, but Allah does not do any guidance and does not confer any grace, unless attempt and exertion is carried out by servants. One who has decided to go this path and tries, Allah will hold his hands, saves him from devils' temptations and so leads him to the destination.

In other words, Divine grace and bless has sometime religious aspect, that has come forth through mission of prophets, revelation of heavenly books, legalization of ordinances, glad tidings and warnings.

And it is sometime genetic or inherent, that comes forth through Divine spiritual helps. The verses in question (out of indication of the sentence 'man yasha') mostly concern the second section.

Meanwhile, we must pay attention that the words ‘Zakat’ and ‘Tazkiyah’ originally mean ‘to grow’ and ‘to cause to grow’, but in most cases they have been applied in the sense of: ‘to become clean’ and ‘to clean something’. They may have one root, because no growth and development occurs when evils and corruptions are not got rid of.

Sura An-Nur – Verse 22

وَلَا يَأْتَلُ أُولُوا الْفَضْلِ مِنْكُمْ وَالسَّعَةِ أَنْ يُؤْتُوا أُولِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينَ
وَالْمُهَاجِرِينَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلْيَعْفُوا وَلْيَصْفَحُوا أَلَا تُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يَغْفِرَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ
غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

22. “And let not those who possess dignity and ease among you swear against giving to the near of kin and the needy, and fugitives for the cause of Allah. And they should pardon and overlook. Do you not like that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.”

The Arabic word /Safaha/ means to ignore, which is more important than forgiveness. Some have said that /safh/ is a forgiveness that is without rebuke and reproof.

Some commentators have narrated an occasion of revelation for this holy verse, which shows how this verse is related to the pervious verses.

They say that this holy verse was revealed about some Companions of the Prophet (S). After the event of 'Ifk, they took an oath to withdraw their financial helps from those who were involved in that event and spread this great calumny.

They decided to give them no generous succour, in anything. But this noble verse prevented them from this violation and harshness. It orders them to be forgiving and lenient.

This occasion of revelation has been quoted by Qurtabi in his commentary narrated from Ibn Abbas; and Dahhak, as well as the deceased Tabarsi, have narrated it from Ibn Abbas and other persons, and it is general.

But some Sunni commentators insist that this verse is revealed about Abu Bakr who terminated his financial help to Mastah Ibn 'Athathah, his maternal aunt's son or his sister's son, who helped to the circulation of 'Ifk.

However all pronouns that are used in the verse are plural. This matter shows that a group of Muslims decided to put an end to their helps unto these wrongdoers, and this verse prohibited them from this decision.

Anyway, we know that the verses of Qur'an are not limited to occasion of revelation, and they involve all believers till Doomsday. The holy verse implicitly recommends Muslims not to be influenced by hot vehement feelings and they should not make rough and excessive decisions against wrongdoers' errors and faults.

With regard to this occasion of revelation, we return to the commentary of the verse.

The holy Qur'an says:

“And let not those who possess dignity and ease among you swear against giving to the near of kin and the needy, and fugitives for the cause of Allah...”

This way of saying shows that a group of those who were involved in 'Ifk were from among the Emigrants in the way of Allah. They were deceived by hypocrites and because of their past records Allah did not allow them to be ostracized from Islamic society and He did not let the Muslims decide some horrible things about them that were more than the limit they deserved.

Meanwhile the Qur'anic holy phrase /la ya'til/ is whether derived from the word /'iliyyah/ (on the rhythm of /'itiyyah/), meaning to take an oath, or from the word /'alw/ (on the rhythm of 'Dalw'), meaning to abandon and to shrink.

Thus, the verse, according to the first meaning, prohibits taking an oath to terminate such helps. And, according to the second meaning, the verse precludes withdrawal of such action.

Then to encourage Muslims to continue such good deeds, it adds:

“...And they should pardon and overlook...”

As we expect Allah's forgiveness, we must not forget to forgive others. The verse continues saying:

“...Do you not like that Allah should forgive you? And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.”

It is interesting that, on one hand, the companions of 'Ifk were severely reprimanded, but, on the other hand, to prevent extremists from resorting to measures beyond the norm and to control their feelings, 3 sentences, each of which is more interesting and remarkable than the others, were used: first, it is ordered to be forgiving and condoning.

Then it says:

“...Do you not like that Allah should forgive you?...”

(so you must forgive). Finally, two of Allah's attributes that are 'Forgiving' and 'Merciful' are mentioned as an emphasis. It indicates that they could not be more legalistic than Allah's commandment. Allah, Who Himself has issued this judgment, is Forgiving and Merciful. He enjoined them not to terminate the

helps, so what did they want to say?

Undoubtedly, all Muslims who were involved in 'Ifk affair did not have a before-hand scheme, but some pseudo-Muslim hypocrites set it and a group of deceived Muslims followed them. Certainly all of them were on the wrong side of the law and were guilty, but there were a lot of differences between these two groups. They could not be treated alike.

Anyway, the above-mentioned holy verses are today and tomorrow a great lesson for Muslims and all future generations; when some persons commit a sin or make a mistake we must not exceed in the limits of punishment. They must be excluded from Islamic society and must not be barred from helps so that they resort to enemy and become one of foes.

The above verses, in fact, portray the balance of Islamic repulsion and attraction; the verses of 'Ifk and the severe punishment of those who made false statements about people's wives compose the great power of repulsion. The verse in question, that mentions Allah's mercifulness, forgiveness, and clemency, represents the attraction!

Sura An-Nur - Verse 23

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَرْمُونَ الْمُحْصَنَاتِ الْغَافِلَاتِ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ لُعُنُوا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَلَهُمْ
عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

23. "Verily those who accuse chaste, believing women unaware (of evil), are cursed in this world and the Hereafter, and for them shall be a grievous chastisement, "

Of course unbelievers, murderers, advocates of illegitimate rulers, hypocrites, mischief-makers, polytheists, the arrogant, oppressors, liars, perjurers, and those who disclaim the Truth have been cursed in the Qur'an, but the curse of the world and the Hereafter along with great punishment, covers only those who stigmatize pure persons.

Imam Sadiq (as) considers this verse as evidence for the fact that unjust accusation of pure and chaste women is one of the great sins.²

Thus, in this verse the Qur'an returns to the issue of Qathf and accusing chaste faithful women of unchaste action, and it decisively says:

"Verily those who accuse chaste, believing women unaware (of evil), are cursed in this world and the Hereafter, and for them shall be a grievous chastisement, "

In fact, three attributes are mentioned for these women. Each of these attributes is a reason for the

importance of the oppression that is imposed on them through calumny.

These attributes are: 'Mohsanat' ('virtuous women'), 'Qafilat' ('far from and unaware (of any pollution)'), and 'Mu'minat' ('believing women'). In this way it is indicated how oppressing and unfair is accusing these persons of inadmissible accusations and this action deserves a great punishment.³

By the way, the application of the Qur'anic word /qafilat/ is an interesting meaning. It specifies the ultimate of their pureness from any deviation and unchasteness. It means that they are so heedless of sexual defilements that as if they are not at all aware of it.

For sometimes the attitude of a person toward sin is in a way that thought of sin goes out of his mind, as if there were not existed at all such an action. This is the supreme grade of piety.

Another possibility is that the purpose of /qafilat/ is the women who are not aware of the unjust accusations attributed to them; therefore, they do not defend themselves.

So, this verse mentions a new matter about such accusations, because the pervious verses referred to the calumniators who could be recognized and then would be punished, but, here, the rumour-fabricators, who have hidden themselves from punishment and religiously prescribed punishment, are brought up.

The Qur'an implies that they should not think that by this action they can escape from the Divine punishment forever. Allah, the Almighty, curses them in the world and, in the Hereafter, they will have an awful chastisement.

With regard to the fact that the above verse is placed after the story of 'Ifk, and it seems that its revelation had some relation with this affair, but like, many verses that are sent down for a special case and their content is general, this verse is also not limited to a certain case.

It is strange that some commentators such as Fakhr-i-Razi, in his book: 'Tafsir-i-Kabir' and some others insist that the content of this verse is limited to calumination of the Prophet (S)'s wives. They mainly equal this sin to paganism and consider the word /lu'inu/ (cursed), mentioned in the verse, as reason for it.

Of course calumination is a great sin and if it is about the wives of the Prophet (S), it is greater and more cardinal, yet it does not by itself bring paganism.

Thus, the Prophet (S) did not treat those who were involved in that affair as apostates, but, as we explained in the commentary of the holy successive verses, he recommended the Muslims to be being merciful toward them and not to be excessively violent toward them, which is not consistent with paganism.

The word /la'n/ is 'being away from Allah's bless', which is applied to pagans and those who commit

cardinal sins. Therefore, in the verses that are about the punishment of Qathf (in the ordinances of /li'an/ (conjugal anathema)), the word /la'n/ has been applied two times about liars.

In Islamic narrations, the word /la'n/ (curse) is frequently applied to those who commit great sins. The tradition which says:

*“Allah has cursed ten groups concerning wine...”*⁴

is very famous.

Sura An-Nur – Verse 24

يَوْمَ تَشْهَدُ عَلَيْهِمْ أَلْسِنَتُهُمْ وَأَيْدِيهِمْ وَأَرْجُلُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

24. “On the day when their tongues and their hands and their feet testify against them as to what they used to do.”

The issue of testimony of body's limbs is many times brought up in the Qur'an. Therefore in this verse it specifies how this group of calumniators will appear in Allah's great court.

It denotes that they will have an awful chastisement in Hereafter, when it says:

“On the day when their tongues and their hands and their feet testify against them as to what they used to do.”

Their tongues will move, in spite of their reluctance, and they express the truth. These wrongdoers will confess their sin in spite of their willing when they see all Divine unquestionable evidences and reasons.

In spite of their inner willing, they will explicitly reveal everything, because they will see they can no longer disclaim. Their own hands and feet will also speak. According to the verses of the holy Qur'an, even their body's skin will start talking. It seems that they have been voice recorders that have recorded man's voices, and signs of sins are stored on them during lifetime.

Yes, on the Day of manifestation, all of these things will appear.

If we see that some of the verses of the holy Qur'an refer to the Day of Judgment and say,

“This day We seal up mouths, and hands speak out and feet bear witness as to what they used to earn”⁵,

there will be no inconsistency with the concerned verse, because it is possible of first that tongues get

disabled and other limbs testify and when testimony of hand and foot discovers truths and they say what they must say, then tongue moves and confesses the sins.

Imam Baqir (as) said:

“This testimony of the limbs is not against the believers, but it is against someone whose punishment is inevitable.”⁶

Sura An-Nur – Verse 25

يَوْمَئِذٍ يُؤَقِّبِهِمُ اللَّهُ دِينَهُمُ الْحَقَّ وَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ الْمُبِينُ

25. “On that day Allah will pay them their just due, and they will know that Allah, He is the (very) Manifest Truth.”

It is only in the Hereafter that retributions will be given in full.

The Arabic word /din/, mentioned in this holy verse means either retribution or religion. Therefore, the holy verse either implies that Allah fully pays people's retribution in hereafter, or that the real and true divine religion will be represented to people and all fantastic religion-founders will realize that Allah is the real deity Who is true, right, and obvious.⁷

Since full retribution cannot be materialized in this world for its limitations, for example, how we can in this world punish a pilot who has bombarded a city and has killed thousands of people. But there is no limitation in the Hereafter and a criminal can be burnt many times in the Hell and each time he will be alive again.

The verse says:

“On that day Allah will pay them their just due, and they will know that Allah, He is the (very) Manifest Truth.”

If today, in this world, they doubt in the rightfulness of Allah, or they lead people astray, in the resurrection day the signs of Allah's magnificence, power, and rightfulness are so obvious that will make the most stubborn people confess.

Sura An-Nur – Verse 26

الْخَبِيثَاتُ لِلْخَبِيثِينَ وَالْخَبِيثُونَ لِلْخَبِيثَاتِ وَالطَّيِّبَاتُ لِلطَّيِّبِينَ وَالطَّيِّبُونَ

لِلطَّيِّبَاتِ أَزْوَاجٌ مِّمَّنْ يَقُولْنَ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَرِزْقٌ كَرِيمٌ

26. "Impure women are for impure men, and impure men for impure women. Good women are for good men, and good men are for good women; such are innocent of that which they say: For them is forgiveness and a bountiful provision."

This verse propounds a general principle and it does not imply that if a man or a woman is good, his or her spouse necessarily is also good, forgiven and is one of the people of the Heaven. For the Holy Qur'an counts faith, piety, and good deed as the criterion, therefore, in spite of the fact that Noah and Lut (as) were pure and faithful, their spouses were evil and Hellish.

The Arabic word /tayyib/ means pleasant and nice. In the Qur'an this word has been used in description of property, offspring, discourse, city, spouse, food and sustenance, home, angle, tree, and greeting. Its contrary word is the Qur'anic term /xabi/ with the sense of: malicious and evil. It has also been used in description of property, man, spouse, speech, deed, and tree.

This verse can be interpreted in different ways:

1. With regard to the previous verses that were about chaste women and the affair of 'Ifk and with regard to the sentence:

"...such are innocent of that which they say...",

the verse means that the evil words such as calumny and slander are appropriate for malicious people, and pure and nice words are suitable for pure persons.

2. It is possible that the purpose of the verse is intellectual, doctrinal, ethical conformity, so as to say that man and wife must be matching and soft-hued with each other. It means that every person naturally seeks an individual of the same wavelength. In other words, vile persons are after evil ones and on the contrary good persons are after good ones.

The verse says:

"Impure women are for impure men, and impure men for impure women. Good women are for good men, and good men are for good women..."

3. It is possible that the purpose of the verse is stating a religious ordinance, meaning that marriage of good persons with malicious ones is unlawful.

It is like the third verse of this Sura, which says:

"The fornicator shall not marry save a fornicatress or an idolatress..."

Imam Baqir (as) in a tradition confirms this meaning, too.⁸

Therefore, the words ‘Khabithat’ and ‘Khabithun’ refer to women and men who are unchaste and, on the contrary, the words ‘Tayyibat’ and ‘Tayyibun’ refer to chaste women and men, and the purpose of the verse is apparently this.⁹

In the end, the verse refers to the recent group that is pure men and women.

It is said:

“...such are innocent of that which they say...”

Therefore Divine pardon and forgiveness as well as valuable sustenance awaits them.

The verse concludes:

“...For them is forgiveness and a bountiful provision.”

1. We have discussed about the difference about ‘(lewdness) in decency’ and ‘abominable acts’ in the commentary of verse 90 from Sura An-Nahl, No. 16, p. 511

2. Bihar, Vol. 76, p. 9

3. Al-Mizan, Vol. 15, p. 122

4. Khisal, by Saduq, Chapter ‘Asharah

5. Sura ya-Sin, No. 36, verse 65

6. Nur-uth-Thaqalyn, ‘Usul-i-kafi, Vol.2 p. 32

7. Al-Mizan, the Commentary

8. Majma‘ ul-Bayan, and Wasa’il-ush-shi’ah, Vol. 14, p. 337

9. We read in the narrations concerning Nikah (marriage) that some of the companions of Imams sometimes asked about ‘Khabithah’ and they were answered negatively. This itself shows that the word ‘khabithah’ refers to unchaste women, not evil ‘words’ or evil ‘deeds’.

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