

## Suratul Baqarah: Verses 204–207

(٢٠٤) وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يُعْجِبُكَ قَوْلُهُ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَيُشْهَدُ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ مَا فِي قَلْبِهِ وَهُوَ أَلَدُّ الْخِصَامِ

(٢٠٥) وَإِذَا تَوَلَّىٰ سَعَىٰ فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيُفْسِدَ فِيهَا وَيُهْلِكَ الْحَرْثَ وَالنَّسْلَ ۗ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْفُسَادَ

(٢٠٦) وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُ اتَّقِ اللَّهَ أَخَذَتْهُ الْعِزَّةُ بِالْإِثْمِ ۗ فَحَسْبُهُ جَهَنَّمُ ۗ وَلَيْسَ الْمِهَادُ

(٢٠٧) وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَشْرِي نَفْسَهُ ابْتِغَاءَ مَرْضَاتِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ رَءُوفٌ بِالْعِبَادِ

***And among men is he whose talk in the life of this world pleases you, and takes Allah to witness as to what is in his heart, yet he is the most violent of adversaries (204).***

***And when he becomes ruler, he strives on earth that he may cause mischief therein and destroy the crop and the progeny; and Allah does not love mischief (205).***

***And when it is said to him, fear Allah, he is overcome by honour (pride) by sin; so enough for him is Hell; and certainly it is an evil abode (206)***

***and Among men is he who sells his self (soul) to seek the pleasure of Allah; and Allah is Affectionate to the servants (207).***

### Commentary

This is another classification of men according to their character. As the preceding verses (200—202) classified them according to their want of this world or the Hereafter, these verses do so from the point of view of their hypocrisy or the sincerity of their faith. And this is the link between these and the

preceding verses.

**Qur'an: *And among men ... most violent of adversaries:***

*a'jabahu* (اعجبه) means gave him pleasure, delighted him. The words, ***in the life of this world*** are connected with ***pleases you***. The meaning is: his talk pleases you in this life, because in this life one has to rely on appearances.

The deeper traits and inner feelings are hidden behind a curtain which cannot be lifted at all, although sometimes some clues are found which help one to surmise what lies behind the curtain.

Then come the words:

***and takes Allah to witness as to what is in his heart.***

He talks in a way that pleases you: he seems eager to protect the way of the truth, appears keen to do good for the people, looks enthusiastic for the advancement of the cause of the religion and the *ummah*.

And to show that his voice comes from the depth of his heart, he calls on Allah to be his witness. But, in reality he is the most virulent enemy of the truth.

*Aladd* (الدد) is the adjective in superlative degree, derived from *ladda ludḍan* (he became a very violent adversary, لدد لدودا) *khisam* (الخصام) is plural of *khasm* (الخصم) by the paradigm of *sa'b:si'ab* (: صعب صعاب) and *ka'b:ki'ab* (كعب : كعاب).

Also it is said that it is an infinitive verb, and that *aladdu 'l-khisam* (الدد الخصام) means “most violent in enmity”.

**Qur'an: *And when he become ruler he strives on earth that he may cause mischief therein:***

*tawalli* (التولى) means to get authority and power. Further support of this meaning comes from the next verse:

***he is overcome by honour (pride) by sin.***

It shows that he has got an honour (i.e., a cause of pride) earned with sin. (The sin is committed by his heart that does not conform with his tongue.)

*Sa'y* (السعى) means to strive, to walk hurriedly. Thus the verse means: When this hypocrite, this most violent of adversaries, gets a chance to do something, and is given authority and rules over the people, he hastens hither and thither and strives to create mischief in the land.

*Tawalli* (التولى) may also mean to turn back, to be out of sight. In that case the verse would mean: “And when he turns back (from you), his actions in your absence belie his talk in your presence.”

The enthusiasm for the common welfare and the good of the *ummah* turns into striving in the land to create mischief and evil.

**Qur'an: *and destroy the crop and the progeny:***

Apparently it is a description of the mischief. He creates mischief by destroying the crop and the progeny. The continued existence of the human species depends on food and procreation.

These are the two most essential things which the human species cannot do without. Procreation is clear from the word 'progeny'. So far as food is concerned, man acquires it from the animal and the plant; animals again acquire it from plants.

Thus, the basis of food is the plant which is obtained from crops. That is why the mischief and destruction has been explained in terms of crops and progeny. The verse means that he creates mischief and destruction in the earth by eliminating through the destruction of crop and progeny.

**Qur'an: *and Allah does not love mischief:***

*fasad* (الفساد) literally means deterioration, corruption, decay, negation, immorality; here it has been translated as mischief.

*Fasad* (الفساد) in this sentence does not refer to the physical decay or destruction in this world. This universe is based on such a system that every destruction leads to a subsequent construction.

A struggle for survival is continuously going on; every existence is followed by extinction, every life by death. Both are found in this natural cosmos side by side. This is the system created by Allah; and how can He hate a thing which He Himself has created and decreed?

It follows that the "mischief" here refers to corruption in the *shari'ah* and legislation.

Allah ordained the laws of religion for the betterment of the actions of His servants; these laws will improve their character and traits; they will keep human society and human beings on the straight path, on the path of moderation.

Thereupon, they will find happiness and prosperity in this life as well as in the life Hereafter. (This will be further explained under the verse 2:213)

Then this man appears on the scene whose words belie his inner feelings; he starts running hither and thither to create immorality and mischief on the earth.

He pretends to improve society, but in reality he destroys. He alters the words of Allah by giving them a wrong meaning; he changes the laws ordained by Allah; he manipulates the teachings of the religion.

All this leads to depravity of character and perennial controversy in religion and society. And, in this

manner, the religion is negated, humanity is eliminated and the whole world is ruined.

To appreciate how true these verses are, look at the history of Islam and see how unauthorised people took the reins of the state in their hands, how they imposed themselves on the Muslim *ummah* and how they corruptly conducted the affairs of religion and state.

They did what they did and the losers were the religion (which got nothing but evil results), the Muslims (who are always in decline and decadence) and the *ummah* (which is perennially plagued with internal strife and dispute.)

The religion is now a ball in the hands of anyone who wants to play with; and human values a toy to be treasured and then discarded at the whim of the child.

The result of this striving of that hypocrite is decay and deterioration on the earth; first, he corrupted religion and then destroyed humanity. That is why in some traditions ***and destroy the crops and progeny*** has been interpreted as the destruction of religion and humanity.

***Qur'an: And when it is said to him, fear Allah, he is overcome by honour (pride) by sin; so enough for is Hell, and certainly it is an ill abode.***

'*izzah* (العِزَّة) means honour, *mihad* (المهاد) is the paved way, abode. Apparently, the words *by sin* qualify the word, ***the honour***, and have no connection with ***he is overcome***.

The verse says that when he is told to fear Allah, he is overcome by the apparent honour which he has earned through his sins and hypocrisy.

The real honour comes from Allah as He says:

***and Thou exaltest whom Thou pleasest and abasest whom Thou pleasest (3:26);***

***and to Allah belongs the honour and to His Apostle and to the believer (63:8);***

***Do they seek honour from them? Then, surely all honour belongs to Allah (4:139).***

Honour is a status which Allah attributes to Himself and declares that it is only He who bestows it on His chosen creatures. Such a thing cannot be a source of sin or evil.

It naturally follows that the honour mentioned in this verse is not real honour which is given by Allah. It is only a masquerade which deceives none except the ignorant people who mistakenly accept it as honour.

The preposition “by” (*b ...*, ب) in “by sin” (*bi 'l-ithm*, بالاثم) has no connection with the verb ***he is overcome***; the word “sin” is neither the object of “is overcome”, nor its cause.

In other words, the verse does not say that his honour or pride drives him to sin and to rejection of the

advice to fear Allah, or incites him to answer back the said advisor in unbecoming language.

Nor does it mean that sin drives him to pride. As mentioned above, the word **by sin** qualifies the word **honour** (or pride), and indicates the honour or pride gained by sin.

Had the word **honour** been left unconditional, it would have meant that Allah recognised it as real honour (which comes from Allah). And in that case it could not be said to create, or be created by, sin or pride.

That is why we say that it is conditional and means an apparent honour which is earned through sin and hypocrisy.

There is another verse where the word honour (*'izzah, العزة*) has been used for the unbelievers. But there, also, the context shows that it means only an appearance of honour, not real honour.

Allah says:

***Nay, those who disbelieve are (steeped) in self-exaltation ('izzatin, عزة) and opposition. How many did We destroy of the generations before them, then they cried but there was no longer any escape (38:2–3).***

Here the word *'izzatin (عزة)* (translated above as “self-exaltation”) is a common noun, it does not have any definite article before it, and the next verse describes the destruction of people like them.

These points clearly show that here also it is only an appearance of honour, a passing shadow which will not last long.

***Qur'an: And among the man is he who sells his self (soul) to seek the pleasure of Allah; and Allah is Affectionate to the servants:***

This verse is in contrast to the preceding three ones. On one side there is a man priding himself in his sins, boasting and self-exalting, showing the doing of good to people, hiding his hypocrisy behind a mask of charming words; and religion and humanity cannot expect of him anything except ruin and destruction.

On the other side is a man who has sold his soul to Allah, he wants nothing except what Allah wishes; he desires nothing for his self; his honour and strength come only from Allah, and he seeks nothing but the pleasure of Allah.

By his presence, religious and worldly affairs re-acquire their correct shape, the truth is revived, humanity enjoys a happy life and the good effects of Islam reach every one.

This also shows the connection of the end of the verse, ***and Allah is Affectionate to the servants***, with its beginning. Surely, the presence of such a man is a great mercy from Allah to His servants.

Had there not been such virtuous people to counteract the designs of those others (whose stock-in-trade is hypocrisy and mischief), the structure of religion would have fallen into ruins, and the foundation of righteousness and goodness would have been destroyed.

But it is the method chosen by Allah that He removes that wrong by this truth, and repairs the damage inflicted by His enemies with the good spread by His beloved and chosen servants. He has said:

***And were it not for Allah's repelling some men with others, the earth certainly would be in a state of disorder (2:251);***

***And had there not been Allah's repelling some people by others, certainly would have been pulled down cloisters, and churches, and synagogues, and mosques in which Allah's name is much remembered (22:40);***

***therefore if these disbelievers in it, We have already entrusted it with a people who are not disbelievers in it (6:89).***

The decadance brought upon the religion and the world by those who love nothing but their own selves cannot be removed except through the good overflowing from those who have sold their souls to Allah, who love nothing except Allah and who desire nothing except that the world and the people of the world may become virtuous.

This deal has been praised by Allah in many verses, one of which is as follows:

***Surely Allah has bought from the believers their selves and their properties, for this that their's be the Garden; they fight in Allah's way, so they slay and are slain; (this is) a promise which is binding on Him in the Torah and the Injil and the Qur'an; and who is more faithful to his covenant than Allah? Therefore, rejoice in the trade that you have transacted; and that is the great achievement (9:111).***

## **Traditions**

It is reported from as-Suddi about the verses, ***And among the men is he whose talk ... an evil abode***, that they were revealed about Akhnas ibn Shariq ath-Thaqafi, an ally of Banu Zuhrah.

He came to the Prophet in Medina and said: "I have come seeking Islam, and Allah knows that surely I am truthful." The Prophet was pleased with that talk.

The words of Allah, ***and takes Allah to witness as to what is in his heart*** refer to this aspect. Then he went out and passed by an agricultural field and some donkeys belonging to some Muslims.

He burnt the filth and wounded and killed the donkeys. It was about that that the verse was revealed,

**and when he turns away (from you) he runs hither and thither on earth so that he may cause mischief therein and destroy the tillage and the stock.** [*ad-Durru 'l-manthiq*]

It is narrated from Ibn 'Abbas that the three verses were revealed about the hypocrites because he shows what is opposed to what he hides in his heart. The author of *al-Majma'* (said that the same was also narrated from as-Sadiq (as.). [*Majma'u 'l-bayan*]

**The author says:** But this interpretation does not fit the apparent meaning of the verse.

It is written in some traditions narrated from the Imams of *Ahlu 'l-bayt* that these verses were revealed about their enemies.

It is narrated from as-Sadiq (a.s.) about the words of Allah, **and destroy the crop and progeny**, that crop means religion, and progeny, humanity. [*Majma'u 'l-bayan* ]

**The author says:** This tradition has already been explained earlier. In another tradition **the crop** has been interpreted as 'progeny and crop'. It is easy to see how this also may fit the earlier explanation.

ash-Shaykh has narrated in his *al-Amali* a tradition from 'Ali ibn al-Husayn (a.s.), about the verse: **And among men is he who sells ... Affectionate to the servants**, that he said:

"It was revealed about 'Ali (a.s.) when he slept (on the night of *hijrah*) on the bed of the Messenger of Allah."

**The author says:** There are innumerable traditions from both Shi'ah and Sunni chains that this verse was revealed about 'Ali concerning his sacrifice on the night of *hijrah*. *Tafsir al-burhan* gives five of those chains from ath-Tha'labi and others.

Ibn Marduwayh has narrated from Suhayb that he said: "When I intended to emigrate from Mecca to the Prophet in Medina, the Qurayshites told me, 'O Suhayb! You came to us and you had no wealth.

Now you want to emigrate with all this wealth of yours. By God, this can't be.' So I said to them, 'What do you think? Would you leave me if I gave you all my wealth?'

They said: 'Yes!' Thereupon I gave them my wealth and they left me. I came out till I reached Medina. This incident was reported to the Prophet and he said: 'Suhayb profited twice.'" [*ad-Durru 'l-manthiq*]

**The author says:** He has narrated it from some other chains also, some of which add: and then the verse was revealed:

**And among men is he who sells his soul ...**

Some other traditions say that it was revealed about Suhayb and Abi Dharr because they purchased themselves by giving away their properties.

But the verse does not say, “he who purchases ...”, it says, **he who sells**. And the interpretation of the verses does not agree with the meaning of “purchase”.

There is a tradition from ‘Ali (a.s.) that this verse refers to a man who is killed because of enjoining to do good and forbidding to do bad. [*Majma‘u ‘l-bayan* ]

**The author says:** It is one example of the general meaning of the verse. There is no difficulty in explaining the meaning of the verse in general terms, though it was sent down on a particular occasion for a particular person.

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