

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَبْطُلُوا صَدَقَاتِكُمْ بِالْمَنِّ وَالْأَذَى كَالَّذِي يُنْفِقُ
 مَالَهُ رِئَاءَ النَّاسِ وَلَا يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَمَثَلُهُ كَمَثَلِ صَفْوَانٍ
 عَلَيْهِ نُرَابٌ فَأَصَابَهُ وَابِلٌ فَتَرَ كُفَّهُ صَلْدًا لَا يَقْدِرُونَ عَلَى شَيْءٍ مِّمَّا
 كَسَبُوا وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٢٦٤﴾

Al-Baqara (The Cow) 2:264

O You Who Believe!

- Cancel not your charity by reminders of your generosity or by injury - like those who spend their substance to be seen of men, but believe neither in Allah nor in the Last Day.
- They are in parable like a hard, barren rock, on which is a little soil: on it falls heavy rain, which leaves it (just) a bare stone.
- They will be able to do nothing with what they have earned.
- And Allah guides not those who reject faith.

Commentary

Allamah Tabai (AR)

The context of the verses (261 – 274) indicates that they must have been revealed all together. Their theme is spending in the way of Allah. They begin with a parable to show that charity increases in the hands of Allah, one to seven hundred or even more, by the permission of Allah. Another parable shows that this increase is sure to happen; it cannot fail. They go to forbid insincerity in spending, that is, spending to show others how generous one is, and give one more parable to demonstrate the futility of this, that such spending does not increase and bears no fruit.

Also, they admonish the believers not to follow charity with reproach and injury, because these two evils nullify alms and make their reward forfeit. Then they say that spending should be from their good and lawful wealth, and not from unlawful or worthless things, as it shows niggardliness and miserliness. Thereafter they prescribe who should be given charity - the poor men who are besieged in the way of Allah. Finally it again reminds them of the great reward of charity which they shall find with Allah.

In short, the verses exhort the believers to spend and explain to them the following things:

- First: The purpose of spending: It should be to seek the pleasure of Allah, not to show off to people.
- Second: The fashion and condition of this good work: It should not be followed by reproach and injury.
- Third: The quality of the wealth to be spent: It must be lawful and good, not unlawful or worthless.
- Fourth: The qualification of the receivers: It should be given to those poor who are besieged in the way of Allah.
- Fifth: The rewards of such spending in this world and in the next.

One of the two pillars of Islam is the Rights of the people; and spending for the welfare of the people is one of the things to which Islam pays the utmost attention. It exhorts a believer to spend for this purpose, and has laid down the rules and opened up the ways for such spending - some of these ways are obligatory and others highly recommended: zakat, khums (the one-fifth tax), penalties to expiate certain illegalities, various types of redemption, obligatory spending and recommended charities. Then there are laws to establish and regulate endowments, settle-ments for residence, or for life, wills, gifts and many similar things.

All this has been done to improve the living standards of the poor classes - the people who cannot meet their expenses without help from others. The intention of Islam is to raise their level to bring them nearer to the people of means.

On the other hand, it has strictly forbidden the rich people from pompous living and showing off their wealth. It has allowed them to live in a reasonable and honorable manner; but has prohibited extravagance and the squandering of wealth in a lavish style which is above the reach of the average person.

The aim of both sets of rules was to create a community life that would be neither too low nor too high, whose various groups would be nearer to each other, and would have a fairly uniform standard of life. Such a society would give life to the institution of unity and cooperation; and would eradicate conflicting designs and uproot enmity and antagonism. The Qur'an holds that the true religion must organize life in all its multifarious activities, putting it in order in such a way that man's bliss is guaranteed in this life as well as in the next one. Such a religion will bless man with true knowledge, noble character and pleasant life; he will be free in this life to enjoy the bounties given to him by Allah, and to remove from himself unpleasant things and all types of misfortune.

This is a fact, the truth of which was demonstrated by the Prophet during his lifetime when he had the authority in his hands. He showed its correctness and demonstrated how it created a stable society, growing, developing and bearing good results.

It was this society for which the Leader of the faithful, Ali (AS) felt nostalgia, and the passing away of which he remembered sorrowfully, in one of his speeches:

You live in a period when the steps of virtue are moving backwards, and the steps of evil are moving forward; and Satan is increasing his eagerness to ruin people. This is the time when his equipment is strong, and his traps have been widely spread and his prey has become easy (to catch). Cast your glance wherever you like. Do you see (anything) except a poor man suffering (the pangs of) poverty, or a rich man changing Allah's favor for ungratefulness, or a miser trampling the right of Allah to increase his wealth, or an arrogant person (who behaves) as though his ears hear any counsel with difficulty.
(Nahjul-Balagha, Sermon 129).

The verse proves that charity becomes forfeited if it is followed by reproach and injury.

Some people say that this verse shows that subsequent sins (and especially big ones) nullify the good deeds preceding them. But this inference is uncalled for. The verse only talks about reproach and injury vis-à-vis charity.

As the verse is addressed to the believers, and as one who does a good deed to show to men is not a believer (because he does not do that deed for the sake of Allah) the prohibition was not extended to showiness; it was confined to reproach and injury, because there is no danger of showiness for a believer. The verse likens the alms-giver who follows his alms with reproach and injury to the one who spends to show off to men; and the likeness is in the forfeiture of charities, although there is a difference between both. The charity of one who spent to show off to men was null and void *ab initio*; while that of the one who followed it with reproach and injury was correct and valid to begin with, but was later nullified because of these sins.

It shows that disbelief here does not imply that the showy person does not believe in Allah at all. Also it proves that doing a deed with the intention of showing off to men implies that such a doer has no faith in Allah and the last day, in so far as that deed is concerned.

"al-Wabil" is heavy rain, descending with force. The pronoun in "They shall not gain" refers to "him who spends to be seen of men", because "him" stands for the whole group of showy persons. The sentence "They shall not gain anything of what they have earned" describes the reason for the analogy; and it is the common factor of the two sides of this simile. The sentence "And Allah does not guide the unbelieving people" describes the general principle: a man who does a deed to show to people is in that particular respect an unbeliever, and Allah does not guide such people. This sentence, therefore, gives the reason for the forfeiture mentioned in this verse.

The man who spends to show off to people can get no reward for such spending. Look at a smooth rock, upon which is some earth, then a heavy rain falls upon it. Now, rain, and especially a heavy downpour, is the apparent cause of the earth coming to life again; it makes it green and adorns it with plants. But if earth settles on a smooth rock it cannot remain in place in a heavy rainfall; it is washed away and the bare rock is left there for everyone to see - the rock which cannot absorb water, nor can it nourish a seed to grow. Rain and earth both together are the most important causes of plant life and growth; but as their place was a smooth rock their effect was totally nullified, although none can attribute any fault or defect to these two life-giving ingredients.

Thus is the case of the man who does a good deed but not with intention of seeking the pleasure of Allah; his action becomes totally null and void, even when the deed, for example, spending in the way of Allah, is among the most effective causes of getting divine reward. But the heart of such a man is like that smooth rock; it is unable to receive divine mercy and grace. And thus he gets nothing of what he had earned.

The verse shows that the acceptance of a deed depends on sincere intention and on the pure aim of seeking the pleasure of Allah. Sunnis and Shi'ahs have narrated from the Prophet that he said:

Verily, deeds are according to intentions.

Mir Ahmed Ali (AR) and Aqa Mahdi Puya (AR)

Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib says that *he who has wealth but does not show off, or he who has the power to avenge but forgives, or he who gives good counsel even to his enemy, or he who spends in the way of Allah with no strings attached, without making it known, is the true hero.*

To attach strings to charity, or to make it known, or to reproach the overly solicitous seeker of help, is an exercise in futility and renders the charity useless.

While giving Zakat and sadqa, one positively lays claim to the act of goodness done in obedience to Allah, but salat is an act of devotion which implies self-denial; the devotee is engrossed in the greatness of the absolute.

Sublime was the devotee, Ali ibn Abi Talib, who performed these two different acts at the same time - prayed as well as spent in the way of Allah, and, therefore, was declared to be the wali of the faithful along with Allah and His messenger, in verse 55 of al Ma'idah.

We are barren like rocks. To be fertile and of benefit to ourselves and to others, we must cover ourselves with the moist earth of *ihsan* (giving more than what one deserves). If we cause harm or injury, it is as if the fertile soil was washed off, leaving us once again barren.

Ayatullah Sayyid Kamal Faqih Imani and a Group of Muslim Scholars

Consider a piece of rock covered with a little amount of dust. When it be sown with good seeds and exposed to fresh air and sunshine, and then, a harsh rain falls upon it, the rain will surely wash-out the thin dust from the rock and scatter the containing seed with the dust. Consequently, the hard impenetrable rock, on which no plant can grow, appears with its rough feature.

This is not for that the fresh air; sunshine and falling rain have had a bad effect. It is because the place where the seed was sown has been an inappropriate place for the aim. Its appearance was adorned while its inner side was an impenetrable rough rock with a mere thin amount of dust over its surface. It is in a state that plants and trees, besides having suitable conditions above the ground, need a good preparation under the ground for the roots in order to spread and feed.

The Qur'an has likened the hypocritical deeds and charities followed with reproach and injury, that which originate from the callous, hearts, to a rock covered with a little dust from which no profit can be gained. So, the efforts of the farmer and the sower will be wasted, too.

Consider a green grass garden which is located on a high productive land and benefited from fresh free air and sufficient sunshine. Useful downpour-falls water it, but when the rainfall is not enough, drizzles and drops of dew preserve the pleasantness and freshness of the garden. As a result, such a garden usually yields its fruits two-fold more than the other ordinary gardens. This sort of gardens, besides having productive land, enjoy of dew and drizzles added to enough rainfalls. They have such a beautiful view that attracts the attention of any visitor from the distance. They are also safe from the threat of floods.