

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مَن يَرْتَدَّ مِنكُمْ عَن دِينِهِ فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِي اللَّهُ بِقَوْمٍ
يُحِبُّهُمْ وَيُحِبُّونَهُ ۖ أَذِلَّةٍ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَعِزَّةٍ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ يُجَاهِدُونَ
فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلَا يَخَافُونَ لَوْمَةَ لَائِمٍ ۚ ذَٰلِكُمْ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَن
يَشَاءُ وَاللَّهُ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٥٤﴾

Al-Ma'idah (The Table Spread) 5:54

O You Who Believe!

- If any from among you turn back from his Faith, soon will Allah produce a people whom He will love as they will love Him.
- Lowly with the believers.
- Mighty against the rejecters.
- Fighting in the way of Allah.
- And never afraid of the reproaches of such as find fault.
- That is the grace of Allah, which He will bestow on whom He pleases.
- And Allah encompasses all, and He knows all things.

Commentary

Allamah Taba Tabai (AR)

al-Irtidad literally means to turn back. In Muslims' terminology, turning back from religion means apostasy, forsaking belief for disbelief, no matter whether that belief was preceded by disbelief or not. If an unbeliever accepts Islam and then apostatizes, he is called *murtad milli*; if a born Muslim turns back from Islam, he is called *murtad fitri*. This terminology is either laid down by the *shari'ah* or by the Muslims themselves.

Such a sublime position does not demand more than paying attention to the basic theme, i.e. appraising them that Allah would bring a community of believers who would not turn back from His religion. The other attributes that they shall love Allah and He shall love them, and that they will be lowly before the believers and mighty against the unbelievers, etc. are additional characteristics that have been described here keeping in view additional requirements of context and conditions.

Looking at it from another angle, we realize that the said attributes are not without some connection with the theme of the preceding verses regarding befriending the Jews and the Christians rather than the believers. Taking them as friends rather than the believers, shows a certain inclination of heart towards them, a connection of love and affinity; and how could such a polluted heart contain the love of Allah – as Allah says: *Allah has not made for any man two hearts within him;(33:4)*

This friendship would lead the believer to become lowly before the disbelievers and mighty against the believers and show haughtiness before them, as Allah says: ... *Do they seek honor from them? Then surely all honor is from Allah (4:139).*

Another concomitant of this friendship is that they would show laxity in fighting those disbelievers and would shrink from *jihad*; they would not have any patience if they were deprived of any comfort in the way of Allah, nor would they be ready to cut off all social contacts with them. But Allah says: *O you who believe! Do not take My enemy and your enemy for friends: would you offer them love while they deny what has come to you of the truth, If you go forth fighting in My path and seeking My pleasure, would you manifest love to them? (60:1).* Further Allah says: *Indeed, there is for you a good example in Ibrahim and those with him when they said to their people: "Surely we dissociate from you and from what you worship other than Allah; we renounce you, and enmity and hatred have appeared between us and you for ever until you believe in Allah alone"; ... (60:4).*

The above discussion shows that the verse has some connection with the preceding ones; and it makes it clear that Allah's religion does not need such people who are prone to fall into the pit of disobedience and befriend the Jews and the Christians, because hypocrisy crept into their community and now it contains a lot of people with diseased hearts. They sell religion for worldly benefits, and covet the fallacious honor and transient influence rather than the honor and power, which are reserved for Allah, His Messenger, and the believers. They do not care for the real felicity, which covers life of this world as well as that of the next.

The verse expounds it by giving information about a future upheaval: If religion suffers from unsteady capricious behavior of the people of weak faith who prefer love of other than Allah over that of Allah, seek honor near enemies of Allah, show laxity in fighting in His way and fear blames and admonition of His enemies, then certainly soon Allah will bring a people who shall love Him and He shall love them; who shall be lowly before the believers, mighty before the unbelievers, and who shall fight in the way of Allah and shall not fear the censure of any censurer.

Although many exegetes were aware that the verse contains information of a future cataclysm, and spent much time on deciding whom the verse should be applied to; yet they did not take trouble to properly explain its wordings. As a result, they failed to correctly interpret the attributes mentioned in it. Consequently, they treated the divine speech just like a human talk which includes many a loop-holes and inaccuracies.

“O you who believe! Whoever of you turns back from his religions”

As explained earlier, turning back from religion here means taking the Jews and the Christians for a friend. The verse, like the preceding one, is addressed to the believers. The main theme is to declare that the true religion does not need such people’s belief, which is polluted with love of the enemies of Allah. Allah has counted such friendship as disbelief and polytheism, as He has said: *and whoever amongst you takes them for a friend, then surely he is one of them*. It is because Allah is the Guardian and Helper of His religion, and as an aspect of His help to His religion, He will certainly bring a people who will renounce the enemies of Allah, and love His friends and will not love any except Him.

“then soon Allah will bring a people”

Allah has ascribed the bringing to Himself to confirm the meaning of His help to His religion. The context makes it clear that this religion has got a Helper, besides Whom it does not need any helper – and that is Allah Himself.

Bringing of these people is attributed to Allah. It does not mean that He will create them, because there is no creator except Allah. He has said: *Allah is the Creator of everything* (39:62). Rather this bringing connotes that it is He Who shall arouse them to take the opportunity to help the religion; and shall enhance their honor by loving them and being loved by them; He will help them in being lowly before His friends and mighty against His enemies, and in fighting His way and ignoring every censurer’s comments. Therefore, their help to the religion is Allah’s help to it through them and by means of them. Whether this promise is implemented at once or after sometime is all the same for Allah, also because its limitation differentiates between nearness and farness.

“He shall love them and they shall love Him”

Love is unrestricted with any attribute or adjective; thus this mutual love is for ‘person’ only without any condition. They love Allah; it follows that they give preference to their Lord over anything else, be it wealth, honor, family, or other such things. They do not love anyone among the enemies of Allah; if they love anyone, it is reserved for the friends of Allah because of the love of Allah.

As for His love to them, it means that they are free from every injustice, clean of every spiritual uncleanness, be it disbelief or sin. They attain this cleanness through divine protection, or through divine forgiveness resulting from repentance. It is because Allah does not love any injustice or sin as He says: *then surely Allah does not love the unbelievers (3:32); And Allah does not love the unjust (3:57); surely He does not love extravagant (6:141); and Allah does not love the mischief-makers (5:64);..... Surely Allah does not love those who exceed the limits (2:190); Surely He does not love the proud (16:23); surely Allah does not love the treacherous (8:58)*, apart from other such verses.

In short, they are the true believers whose belief is not tainted with injustice, and Allah has said: *Those who believe and do not mix up their faith with injustice, those are they who shall have the security and they are those who go aright (6:82)*. So, they are protected from going astray; and Allah has said: *surely Allah does not guide him who leads astray, (16:37)*. Thus they are under divine protection against every straying and are led by divine guidance onto His straight path. They because of their faith – confirmed by Allah – are guided to following the Messenger and total submission to him, as they surrendered totally to Allah. Allah says: *But no! By your Lord! They do not believe until they make you a judge of that which has become a matter of disagreement among them, and then do not find any straitness in their hearts as to what you have decided and submit with total submission (4:65)*.

The book ad-Durrul-manathur says: Ibn Abi Shaybah and Ibn Jarir have narrated from Ayyah ibn Sa'd that he said: "Ubadah ibn as-Samit (from Banul-Harith ibn al-Khazraj) came to the Messenger of Allah (S), and said, 'O Messenger of Allah! I have numerous friends among the Jews and I adhere to Allah and His Messenger getting clear of the friendship of the Jews, and I love Allah and His Messenger.'

Then Abdullah ibn Ubayy said, 'I am a man who fears lest a calamity should befall me. I shall not renounce the friendship of my guardians.' So the Messenger of Allah (S) said to Abdullah ibn Ubayy,

O Abul-Hubab! Do you think that what you have spoken of the Jews' friendship is for you against Ubadah?' He said, 'Then I'll accept.' So Allah revealed [the following] verses: *O you who believe! Do not take the Jews and and Allah will protect you from the people; (5:51-67)*."

As-Suyuti narrates, through Ibne Jarir and Ibnul-Mundhir, from Ikrimah that [he said],

The verse: *O you who believe! Do not take the Jews and the Christian for friends; they are friends of each*, was revealed about Banu Qurayzah; when they committed treachery and broke the pact they had with the Messenger of Allah (S), by writing to Abu Sufyan ibn Harb, calling them and the Quraysh to enter into their fortresses. So the Prophet (S) sent Abu Lubabah ibn Abdul-Mundhir to them in order that he might urge them to come down from their fortresses.

When they agreed to come down, he pointed to his throat – meaning slaughter. At the same time, Talhah and az-Zubayr were corresponding with the Christians and the Syrians. And I have been told that some companions of the Prophet (S) were afraid of being afflicted with poverty and indigence, so they corresponded with the Jews of Banu Qurayzah and Banun-Nadir, giving them news about the Prophet (S), [expecting] to seek from them loan and (other) benefits [afterwards]. So they were forbidden it.
(ad-Durrul-manthur)

Majmaul-bayan writes under the verse: *O you who believe! Whoever of you turns back from his religion, then soon Allah will bring a people He shall love them and they shall love Him*. And it has been said, ‘They are: the Leader of the faithful Ali (AS) and his companions, when he fought those who fought against him – the *nakithin* (pledge-breakers), the *qasitin* (deviators from the truth), the *mariqin* (heretics) [in the battles of Jamal, Siffin and Nahrawan, respectively.] It has been narrated from Ammar, Hudhayfah and Ibn Abbas; and it is also narrated from Abu Ja’far and Abu Abdillah (AS).

As for the attributes of being gentle with the believers and hard against the unbelievers, and waging war in the way of Allah, without being afraid of a censure of any censurer, nobody can that Ali (AS), fully deserved these virtues. His *jihad* against polytheists and unbelievers is well known, and everyone is aware of his strivings in strengthening of Islam and helping the religion, as well as his gentleness before the believers.

Of course ath-Tha’labi has written in his at-Tafsir that it was revealed about Ali (AS). Also it is narrated in Nahjul-bayan (of al-Shaybani) from al-Baqir and as-Sadiq (AS) that it was revealed about Ali (AS). But looking at them in conjunction with other traditions, it becomes clear that these too mean Ali and his companions who stood with him to help the religion in the battles of the Camel, Siffin and the Khawarij.

Apart from that, there are a lot of traditions narrated through Sunni chains that the verse: *Only Allah is your Guardian and His Messenger and those who believe, those who keep prayers*, was revealed for Ali (AS) although it uses plurals.

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

A careful study of verses 54 and 55 indicates that they have no relation with the preceding verses prohibiting friendship with infidels. The subject matter of verse 54 is quite different. It is in praise of Ali, about his nomination to political and religious leadership; and wherein the renegades have been warned of his might and valour, and frightened of his great overwhelming influence.

The Holy Prophet said:

The resolute co-operation among the Quraysh will not dissipate unless Allah appoints over you a man whose heart Allah has tested through severe trial of faith. He will strike your necks and you will be as afraid of him as frightened sheep.

Whereupon Abu Bakr inquired if he was that man and Umar inquired if he was that man. The Holy Prophet replied: "No. But the person who is mending shoes inside the room is that man." And Ali turned up with shoes in his hand which he was repairing for the Holy Prophet.

Many traditionists have recorded it with slight variations-Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his Musnad, Hakim in his Mustadrak, Abu Yala in his Musnad, and Muttaqi in his Kanz al-Ummal.

It is a warning about Ali's might, as explained by himself on the day of the battle of Jamal. Tha-labi has mentioned it in his Tafsir and the compiler of Majma al-Bayan has reproduced it as related by Ammar, Hudhayfah and Ibn Abbas. This becomes clearer when we notice the fact that verse 55 (innama waliyukum) follows this verse, wherein Allah has suggested His superior authority and hinted at the necessity of Ali's leadership (imatat). Verse 55 explains and clarifies the reference in verse 54.

In the battle of Khaybar the second caliph (like other companions) tried to conquer the fort, but took to flight when the Jew soldiers overpowered his contingent. Before the Holy Prophet they blamed each other for showing cowardice in the battlefield.

(Tarikh Tabari Vol. 2; page 300)

The Holy Prophet said:

"Certainly (the next morning) I will send the man whom Allah will never put to shame, who loves Allah and His messenger and is equally loved by Allah and His messenger."

Utter disappointment was the lot of many a companion who yearned for this distinction - "Allah shall bring a people whom He shall love and who shall love Him", as has been clearly pointed out in this verse. Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his Musnad, vol. 1, p. 330; Nisa-i in Khasa-is al Alawiyah, p. 6; Hakim in his Mustadrak, Vol. 3, p. 123; and Dhahabi in his Talkhis have recorded this tradition in the "ten excellent merits" of Ali, not possessed by anybody else.

"Striving hard in the way of Allah", refers to no one but Ali, who, in all the battles fought by the Holy Prophet (Badr, Uhad, Khandaq, Khaybar and others-refer to authentic books of history written by well-known Muslim scholars), not only defeated and destroyed the enemies of Allah but demolished their power base beyond recovery.

Aqa Mahdi Puya says:

The qualities, mentioned in this verse and verse 29 of al Fat-h (according to well-known traditions written in Sahihs, Musnads and Tafsirs), were owned by no one but Ali. In all the battles fought by the Holy Prophet against the enemies of Allah, the Shaykhayn (the first caliph and the second caliph) never played a decisive role in any battle, nor won victory in single combats or general confrontations; on the contrary they were always either overpowered or ran away from the scene of action. More often they did not carry out the orders given to them by the Holy Prophet. The Holy Prophet knew that Dhith-Thadiyyah was an apostate, so he asked the Shaykhayn to kill him, but they disobeyed and spared his life; and it was this renegade who, according to Sahih Bukhari and others, became the leader of the Khawarij, and was finally killed by Ali in the battle of Nahrawan.

No doubt the Shaykhan and their adherents were severe and hard against the Ahlul-Bayt and their followers .

"Allah shall bring a people", refers to those who, later on, gathered under the banner of Ali (whose qualities have been clearly described in this verse and verse 29 of al Fath), in the battles of Jamal, Siffin and Nahrawan. When Ammar ibn Yasir was asked as to how could he fight against the people who professed Islam, he replied: "We fight under the banner of Ali against those who are under the banner of Mu-awiyah, in keeping with the Quran. They professed Islam but concealed infidelity in their hearts, and have now come out in their true colour of apostasy."

The followers of Ali strive hard in the way of Allah, not fearing the criticism of the apostates. The devotees of the other Imams of Ahlul-Bayt also come in this category, and according to many commentators of all schools of thought in Islam (Majma ul Bayan) at the time of the reappearance of Imam al Mahdi the world will witness the true interpretation of these phrases of the Quran.

The Muslims did not oppose the actions taken against the apostates in the times of the Shaykhayn, but they criticised Ali ibn abi Talib for fighting against A-isha and Mu-awiyah; therefore, this verse refers only to Ali and his devotees.

There is no historical evidence to prove that the Holy Prophet ever referred to any fight by Abu Bakr, Umar or Uthman against the apostates, but he had predicted Ali's fight against three types of apostates-nakithin (oath-breakers), qasitin (wrong-doers), maraqin (strayed ones). It was also foretold by him that Ammar Yasir would be killed by a group of insurgents.

Verse 55

All the commentators unanimously hold, as Qushaji admits in the *Sharh al-Tajrid* on the subject of imamat, that this verse refers to Ali when he gave his ring to a beggar while bowing down in the course of his prayers. Nasa-i has also recorded this tradition in his Sahihah al-Nasa-i, and so has the author of Al-Jama Bayn al-Sihah al-Sittah (corroboration of the six authentic books) in discussion of the commentary on al Ma'idah, and so does Tha-labi in his Tafsir Kabir, and al Balakhi in his Yanabi has copied it from Ahmad bin Hanbal's Musnad, vol. 5, margin of p. 38.

Please refer to the commentary on this verse in Wahidi's book Asbab al-Nuzul (the circumstances of descent) which contains the tradition related by Ibn Abbas. Al Khatib has recorded the tradition in Al Muttafiq, and Ibn Marduwayh and Abu Shaykh in their Musnads. It is mentioned in Kanz al-Ummal, vol. 6, p. 391, tradition no. 5991. In Ghayah al-Maram, chapter 18, there are twenty four traditions from sources other than the Ahlul-Bayt, all supporting the above statement about the descent of this verse.

When Abi Ishaq Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Naysaburi al Tha-labi reached this verse he recorded the following in his Tafsir al Kabir on the authority of Abu Dharr al Ghifari, who said,

Both of my ears may turn deaf and both my eyes may become blind if I speak a lie. I heard the Holy Prophet saying, Ali is the guide of the righteous and the slayer of the infidels. He who has helped him is victorious and he who has abandoned him is forsaken.

One day I said my prayers in the company of the Holy Prophet; a beggar came to the masjid and begged for alms, but nobody gave him anything. Ali was in a state of ruku in the prayer. He pointed out his ring to the beggar, who approached him and removed the ring from his finger.

Thereupon the Holy Prophet implored Allah, saying: 'O Allah! My brother Musa begged You saying: My Lord, delight my heart and make my task easy and undo the knot in my tongue so that they may understand me, and appoint from among my kinsmen, Harun, my brother, as my vizier, and strengthen my back with him and make him participate in my mission so that we may glorify You and remember You more frequently. Certainly You see us-and You inspired him: O Musa! All your requests have been granted.

(The Holy Prophet continued) Delight my heart and make my task easy and appoint from among my kinsmen Ali as my vizier and strengthen my back with him'. (Abu Dhar proceeds) By Allah, the Holy Prophet had not yet finished his supplication when the trustworthy Jibril descended to him with this verse". (Ibn Khallikan says that Al Tha-labi was unique as a commentator of the Quran and his Tafsir al-Kabir is superior to all other Tafsirs).

In this verse the word wali has been used in the meaning of guardian or master or who holds authority, superior to others. Please refer to the origin of the word wali in Sihah or Mukhtar al-Sihah or any other good dictionary. The lexicographers have explained that he who manages the affairs of and exercises authority for another person is the wali of that person. This verse, therefore, means that those who manage the affairs of the people (mankind) are superior to all men, and certainly they are Allah, His messenger, the Holy Prophet, and Ali, who possesses all the qualifications enumerated in this verse. Allah has simultaneously confirmed His wilayah (superior authority), that of His prophet and his wali (Ali) in unbroken succession. Allah's wilayah is universal, so likewise, the wilayah of the Holy Prophet and his wali (Ali) must be so.

It is not possible to assign to the word wali in this verse the meaning of a helper or a friend, etcetera, for help and friendship are not confined to these three only. All the faithful men and women, according to the holy book, are friends and helpers of one another. It is as obvious as can be that the word wali in this verse means, guardian, ruler, possessor of superior authority. It is in this sense that the word wali has been used by the Holy Prophet in the abovenoted tradition related by Al Tha-labi in his Tafsir al Kabir on the authority of Abu Dharr al Ghifari whom the Holy Prophet had given the title of siddiq (the truthful). There are other authentic traditions, given below, in which the word wali indicates its true meaning:

Ayatullah Sayyid Kamal Faqih Imani and a Group of Muslim Scholars

After the statement upon the hypocrites, the words are about some apostates who, according to the prediction of the Qur'an, turn away from this sacred religion. As a general rule, it warns all the Muslims that: if any one of them turns away from his religion he does not harm Allah, His religion, Muslim society, and their rapid process of progression, because He will soon bring forward a group of people to support this religion. The verse itself says:

" O' you who have faith! whoever of you turns away from his religion (he does not harm Allah, since) soon Allah will bring (forward) a people ..."

Then the Qur'an explains the qualities of those who must undertake this great mission, as the followings:

1- They love Allah and think of nothing but His pleasure.

"...whom He loves and who love Him, ..."

2-3 They are humble and kind unto the believers while they are mighty, stern, and forceful against the enemies and tyrants.

"... stern against infidels, ..."

4- Striving in the way of Allah is their constant program.

5- The last privilege that the Qur'an enumerates for them is that, in the path of performing the command of Allah and defending the right, they do not fear any reproach of any reproacher.

"... and do not fear the scorn of any blamer. ..."

And, at the end of the verse, it remarks that: gaining these privileges, besides their own effort, need the grace of Allah. He bestows it on whomever He desires and finds eligible. For, the extension of His grace and graciousness is very vast, and He (SWT) is aware of those who have competency.

"...This is the grace of Allah. He gives it to whom He desire; and Allah is All-Embracing, All-Knowing."