

Fast 26: Only the principles of religion bear fruit — not desires or labels

- The passage quoted at the start of the last Study (ch. 2, v. 111–112) mentioned the claims of the Jews and the Christians, each for themselves, that only they shall enter paradise. That passage dismisses these claims as being only their “vain desires” (*amānī*). Another verse referring to the same “vain desires” is as follows:

“It will not be in accordance with your vain desires nor the vain desires of the People of the Book. Whoever does evil, will be recompensed for it and will not find for himself besides Allah a friend or a helper.” — ch. 4, v. 123

لَيْسَ بِأَمَانِيكُمْ وَلَا أَمَانِي أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ
مَنْ يَعْمَلْ سُوءًا يُجْزِ بِهِ^١ وَلَا يَجِدْ لَهُ مِنْ دُونِ
اللَّهِ وَلِيًّا وَلَا نَصِيرًا ﴿١٢٣﴾

Here, “*your* vain desires” is mentioned in addition to the “vain desires of the People of the Book”, and it refers to the same kind of wishful thinking by Muslims. This wishful thinking, on the part of followers of each religion, is that they are the ones, the only ones, who shall be forgiven by God for any evil deeds they commit. In case of Jews, their nation is said to have been called by God as “my first-born son” (Exodus, ch. 4, v. 22), whom God helps due to their birth and descent. Christians claim that belief in Jesus as son of God saves them from God’s punishment for sins. Muslims in general have come to hold the belief that only they will be forgiven by Allah, and that when sinners are sent to hell, it will be temporary for Muslim sinners but permanent for non-Muslim sinners. The above verse lays down that Allah does not act according to this wishful thinking, but that whoever does evil deeds is liable to be punished, and can be forgiven only by turning to Allah as their friend and helper.

- A verse that is a companion to the passage of the last Study (ch. 2, v. 111–112) also occurs in chapter 2:

“Surely those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabians,¹ whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and does good, they have their reward with their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve.” — ch. 2, v. 62

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالنَّصَارَى
وَالصَّبِيَّةَ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ
وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ^١ وَلَا
خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

The passage of the last Study (ch. 2, v. 111–112) refuted the claim made by Jews and Christians that *they are the only ones, exclusively*, who shall be rewarded by God.

¹ Note: Sabians followed a religion resembling the Jewish and Christian religions.

This verse looks at it from the *inclusive* point of view, as to who can be included among those who shall find favour with God.

- Many Muslim scholars have declared this verse as “abrogated” and superseded by other statements in the Quran which say that the religion of Islam must be accepted by everyone. They argue that if followers of earlier religions can receive salvation (or the state of “there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve”) along with Muslims as mentioned here, then what was the necessity of Islam coming into the world and why does Islam call upon these people to accept it?
- If we look carefully, what this verse means is that in order to reach the state of salvation, it is necessary to follow certain principles: belief in God, belief in the Last Day, meaning belief in the ultimate accountability for one’s actions, and the doing of good deeds. It is acknowledged in Islam, and no Muslim denies it, that followers of earlier religions during the times of their prophets (be it Moses or Jesus) certainly did receive salvation. But even in those times that was because they followed the three principles mentioned here. That position has not changed, and with the coming of Islam they still need to follow those principles. In fact, these principles are accepted by Jews and Christians, and by other earlier religions as well. This is all that this verse says.
- The separate question is: Where are these principles to be found in their most perfect form? If a religion believes in One God — fine — but if its concept of God is of one who has chosen a particular people or country as its exclusive favourite, then that is a narrow and imperfect concept. Moreover, holding such a belief, it reduces the sense of its followers to recognize that they will be held accountable for their deeds by God in the Hereafter. It diminishes their ability to deal justly with people of other nations and do good towards them in the fullest way. Similarly, if a religion believes in One God, yes, but makes a human being His son and a part of God, that is an imperfect concept of God. If that religion then teaches that the sins of its followers have already been forgiven, it means that their belief in the Last Day ceases to act as a deterrent to wrongdoing and as an incentive to doing good to others.
- The claim of the Quran is that it has been revealed to present and teach these principles: (1) in their *most perfect form* so that people can follow and act on them *to full effect*, and (2) in their *most universal and impartial form*, not favouring or disfavouring any group of humanity. It should also be remembered that reward from God and the state of “having no fear, nor grieving” is a matter of degree. Therefore, this verse can be taken as meaning that whether it is those who believe (i.e., Muslims), or those who are Jews, or Christians, or anyone else, the reward for them

from God will be according to how far they progress in belief in God and the Last Day, and in doing good to others. As to which religion can take people to the highest point in this path, that is a separate question discussed elsewhere in the Quran.

- The following well-known verse may be quoted in this connection:

“O mankind, surely We have created you from a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other. Surely the noblest of you with Allah is the most dutiful of you. Surely Allah is Knowing, Aware.”

— ch. 49, v. 13

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَ

جَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ

أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَىٰ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ

خَبِيرٌ ﴿١٣﴾

To become the **noblest** of all, you have to be the **most dutiful** (most *muttaqi*) of all. It is that door to the **superlative** which the Quran opens to mankind.