

## The Prophet's (p) Love for His Kind Polytheist Uncle, Abu Talib

It was narrated by Sa'id bin Al-Musayyib<sup>1</sup> from his father that, *"When the time of the death of Abu Talib approached, the Messenger of Allah (p) went to him and found Abu Jahl bin Hisham and Abdullah bin Abi Umayyah bin Al-Mughira by his side. The Messenger of Allah (p) said to Abu Talib, 'O Uncle! Say: None has the right to be worshipped but Allah, a sentence with which I shall be a witness for you before Allah.'" Abu Jahl and Abdullah said, 'O Abu Talib! Are you going to denounce the religion of Abdul Muttalib?'" The Messenger of Allah (p) kept on inviting Abu Talib to say it (i.e. 'None has the right to be worshipped but Allah') while they (Abu Jahl and Abdullah) kept on repeating their statement till Abu Talib said as his last statement that he was on the religion of Abdul Muttalib and refused to say, 'None has the right to be worshipped but Allah.' Then the Messenger of Allah (p) said, 'I will keep on asking Allah's forgiveness for you unless I am forbidden (by Allah) to do so.'" So, Allah revealed Qur'an 9:113 concerning him, "It is not fitting for the Prophet and those who believe that they should invoke (Allah) for forgiveness for polytheists even though they be next of kin, after it has become clear to them that they are companions of the fire."*<sup>2</sup>

### Supporting Text

Allah says in Qur'an 28:56, *"Verily, you cannot guide aright everyone whom you love (man ahabta), but it is Allah who guides whom He wills, and He is fully aware of all those who receive guidance."*

Major Qur'an commentators cite the context of the revelation of this verse as being related to the Prophet's polytheist uncle Abu Talib who supported him and whom he loved dearly but could not convince to become a Muslim, as evident in the narration above.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Also referred to by some as Sa'id bin Al-Musayyab.

<sup>2</sup> *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 2, book 23, hadith no.442.

<sup>3</sup> Al-Tabari, Muhammad bin Jarir, *Jamiu al-Bayan fi Ta'wil al-Qur'an*, Mua'ssarah al-Risalah, 2000, vol. 19, p. 598; Abu al-Fida' Ismail Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim*, Dar al-Tayba li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi'i, Medina, 1999/1420AH, vol. 6, p.246; Abd al-Rahman bin Nasir al-Sa'di, *Taysir Karim al-Rahman*, Mua'ssarah al-Risalah, 2000, p. 620

## Comments

Commenting on this verse, Ibn Kathir said, “Allah knows who will be guided and who will not. It is established in Sahih Bukhari and Muslim, that this verse was revealed in reference to Abu Talib, the Prophet’s (p) uncle who used to protect, support and stand by him, and he loved him intensely – natural love, not a love of his faith.”<sup>4</sup>

While the Prophet (p) loved his uncle as a person, he also naturally loved that he should be guided.<sup>5</sup> The verse therefore also, “stresses the inadequacy of all human endeavours to ‘convert’ any other person, however loving or loved, to one’s own beliefs, or to prevent him from falling into what one regards as error, unless that person wills to be so guided.”<sup>6</sup>

## Implications and Lessons

The narrative above clearly indicates that the Prophet Muhammad (p) loved a polytheist, despite the fact that he refused to accept Islam. Also, the verse above (28:56) is an acknowledgment by Allah of the existence of the feeling of love by the Prophet (p) for his polytheist uncle. It shows that a person’s lack of interest in accepting Islam is therefore not a reason to distance oneself from them or despise them.

It also teaches that Islam does not expect Muslims to expunge the natural feelings of love and affection they have towards their relatives and friends, just because they profess another faith. The case of the Prophet’s (p) love for his uncle acknowledged in the verse is therefore proof that people of other faiths are among those whom Muslims may love and hold close relationships

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<sup>4</sup>Abu al-Fida’ Ismail Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Azim*, Dar al-Tayba li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi’i, Medina, 1999/1420AH, vol. 6, p.246

<sup>5</sup> Al-Nawawi, *Sharh al-Nawawi ‘Ala Muslim*, Dra Ihya’ al-Turath al-Arabi, Beirut, 1392, vol.1, p.97; Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, al-Maktabah al-Shamilah, vol.13, p.293.

<sup>6</sup> Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur’an*, The Book Foundation, England, 2003, p.668, n.55 to Qur’an 28:56

with.<sup>7</sup> This teaching is contrary to the claim of some Muslims that Islam frowns at such closeness in interfaith relations.

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<sup>7</sup> Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* (Revised by The Presidency of Islamic Researches, IFTA, Call and Guidance), King Fahd Holy Qur'an Printing Complex, Madinah, 1411H, p.1136, n.3388.