

Comments On The Nature Of Taqleed: Tafseer of Surah al-Baqarah, Verse 170

http://www.muftisays.com/blog/Seifeddine-M/1686_12-06-2011/surah-al.baqarah%2C-170.171.html

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ قَالُوا بَلْ نَتَّبِعُ مَا أَلْفَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ آبَاءَنَا
أُولَئِكَ ابْتِغَاءُ وَهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ شَيْئًا وَلَا يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٧٠﴾
وَمَثَلُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا كَمَثَلِ الَّذِي يَنْعِقُ بِمَا لَا يَسْمَعُ إِلَّا دُعَاءً
وَنِدَاءً صُمُّكُمْ عَمَىٰ فَهْمٌ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٧١﴾

"And when it is said to them: "Follow what Allah has sent down," they say: "Instead, we would follow what we found our fathers on." Is it so - even though their fathers used to understand nothing, nor had they been on the right path? The parable of those who disbelieve is like the one who hears nothing but a call and cry. They are deaf, dumb and blind, so they sense not." (2:170-171)

When these mushrik people were asked to follow the injunctions revealed by Allah through His Messenger, they refused to do so and insisted that they would rather follow the customary practice they had inherited from their fathers because, as they assumed, their models were divinely appointed to follow the way they adopted. Allah Almighty refutes this position of theirs by asking how could they go on following the ways of their fathers, under all conditions, to the exclusion of all other ways, even if their fathers did not understand much about the true faith, nor were they blessed with guidance given by their Lord?

In their lack of understanding, the verse says that the disbelievers resemble the scenario of a person shouting his call to an animal who hears nothing meaningful or significant except a bland cry. The disbelievers, in that state, do hear but not what is intended to correct them, so they are called 'deaf'; and they are tight-lipped when it comes to accepting the truth, therefore, they are 'dumb'; and since they do not see their benefit or loss, they are 'blind'. Consequently, with their vital senses so dulled, they seem to understand nothing.

Comments On The Nature Of Taqleed

No doubt, this verse (170) does censure the blind following of forefathers, but at the same time, it provides a rule and its attending conditions proving that following has its permissible aspect which

has been indicated in la ya'qiloon (**even though their forefathers used to understand nothing**) and la yahtadoon (**nor had they been on the right path**). It is from here that we find out that following the forefathers mentioned in the text of the Qur'an was censured because they lacked reason and guidance. 'Guidance' or the right path signifies injunctions revealed by Allah Almighty, openly and clearly, while 'aql or reason stands for imperative guidance deduced by the great armed vision of Ijtihad from the recognized sources of Islamic Shari'ah.

Now we can see that following the model of those identified in the text cannot be permitted because they do not have a revealed set of laws from Allah, nor do they have the ability to deduce injunctions from the Word of Allah. There is a subtle hint here which we would do well to note. In case, we are satisfied that a certain 'alim has the perfect knowledge of the Qur'an and Sunnah and in the absence of a clear and direct instruction of the two sacred sources, he has the great expertise of a mujtahid so that he can, by analogical deduction, arrive at rulings from the texts of the Qur'an and Sunnah - then, it is permissible to follow such mujtahid 'alim. It does not mean that one has to obey 'his' injunctions and follow 'his person.' Instead, it means that one has to obey the injunctions of Allah alone to the total exclusion of others. But, since a direct and trustworthy knowledge of the injunctions of Allah (in all their ramifications) is not readily available to us due to our ignorance, we have to follow a mujtahid 'alim in order to act in accordance with the injunctions of Allah Almighty.

From what has been said above, it becomes clear that those who haste to quote verses of this nature against following the great mujtahid imams, are themselves unaware of the proven meaning of these verses.

In his comments on this verse, the great commentator, al-Qurtubi (A.R.) has said that the prohibition of following forefathers mentioned in this verse refers to following them in false beliefs and deeds. The aspect of following correct beliefs and good deeds is not included here as it has been very clearly projected in Surah Yusuf in the words of Sayyidna Yusuf (A.S): "**I have disassociated myself from the community of people who do not believe in Allah and who deny the Hereafter and I have chosen to follow the community of my fathers, Ibraheem and Is'haaq and Ya'qoob.**" (12:37-38)

This is good enough to prove that following forefathers in what is false is forbidden while it is permissible, rather desirable, in what is true.

Imaam Al-Qurtubi (A.R.) has taken up the issue of following the mujtahid imams within his comments on this verse. He says:

تعلق قوم بهذه الآية في ذمّ التقليد (الى) وهذا في الباطل صحيح أما
التقليد في الحق فأصل من أصول الدين وعصمة من عصم المسلمين يلجأ
إليها الجاهل المقصر عن درك النظر

"Some people have quoted this verse to support their criticism against Taqlid (following). As far as following the false is concerned, this is correct. But, this has nothing to do with following what is true which is, in fact, a basic religious principle, and a great means of protecting the religion of

Muslims in as much as one who does not have the ability to do Ijtihad must rely on 'following' in matters of religion." (Volume 2, Page 194)