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THE
HOLY QURAN

ENGLISH TAFSEER
CHAPTER 109
SURAH AL-KAFIRUN

COMMENTARY & EXPLANATORY

By
ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

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HOLY QURAN

CHAPTER

109

SURAH AL-KAFIRUN

ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

Introduction and Summary

This is another early Makkan Surah. It defines the right attitude to those who reject Faith; in matters of Truth we can make no compromise, but there is no need to prosecute or abuse anyone for his faith or belief.

C.289 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

*The man of Faith holds fast to his faith,
Because he knows it is true. The man
Of the world, rejecting Faith, clings hard*

*To worldly interests. Let him mind
His worldly interests, but let him not
Force his interests on men sincere
And true, by favour, force or fraud.*

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ (١)

1. Say: O ye that reject Faith!

C6289. Faith is a matter of personal conviction, and does not depend on worldly motives.

Worship should depend on pure and sincere Faith, but often does not: for motives of worldly gain, ancestral custom, social conventions or imitative instincts, or a lethargic instinct to shrink from enquiring into the real significance of solemn acts and the motives behind them, reduce a great deal of the world's worship to sin, selfishness, or futility.

Symbolic idols may themselves be merely instruments for safeguarding the privileges of a selfish priestly class, or the ambitions, greed, or lust of private individuals.

Hence the insistence of Islam and its Prophet on the pure worship of the One True God. The Prophet firmly resisted all appeals to worldly motives, and stood firm to his Message of eternal Unity.

لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ (٢)

2. I worship not that which ye worship,

وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ (٣)

3. Nor will ye worship that which I worship.

C6290. Verses 2-3 describe the conditions as they were at the time when this Surah was revealed, and may be freely paraphrased:

'I am a worshipper of the One True God, the Lord of all, of you as well as of myself; but you on account of your vested interests have not the will to give up your false worship, of idols and self'.

وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَّا عَبَدْتُمْ (٤)

4. And I will not worship that which ye have been wont to worship,

وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَّا أَعْبُدُ (٥)

5. Nor will ye worship that which I worship.

Verses 4-5 describe the psychological reasons: I, being a prophet of Allah do not and cannot possibly desire to follow your false ancestral ways; and you, as custodians of the false worship, have not the will to give up your ways of worship, which are wrong'.

The "will" in the translation represents less the future tense than the will, the desire, the psychological possibility: it tries to reproduce the Arabic noun-agent.

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ (٦)

6. To you be your Way, and to me mine

C6291. 'I, having been given the Truth, cannot come to your false ways: you, having your vested interests, will not give them up. For your ways the responsibility is yours: I have shown you the Truth. For my ways the responsibility is mine: you have no right to ask me to abandon the Truth. Your persecutions will be vain: the Truth must prevail in the end'.

This was the attitude of Faith then: but it is true for all time. Hold fast to Truth, "in scorn of consequence".