

Tafsīr Sūrat al-Hujurāt

Learning Objectives:

- A study of verse 6 of Surat al-Hujurat

A Study of Verse 6/18

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَن تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ
فَتُصِيبُوهَا عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ [6]

O Believers! If an open sinner brings you a report then investigate it (before you act) in case you unwittingly hurt the interests of people and regret your conduct afterwards.

Fāsiq is a person who openly defies God’s law and is not repentant. Consequently, such a person will not be worried about lying either. If they bring important news about something to others, they should not be believed until investigations have been made into their claims.

1. Background to the verse

According to reports this verse was revealed about Walīd b. ‘Uqba, who was sent by the Prophet (S) to the tribe of Banū Muṣṭalīq to collect the *zakāt* tax. When they heard that the representative of the Prophet (S) was on his way, they came out to welcome him. Walīd was alarmed when he saw their large numbers, especially because there was bad blood between him and them in pre-Islamic times (*jāhiliyya*). He thought that they had come to kill him so he rushed back to Madina and reported that the Banū Muṣṭalīq had refused to pay the *zakāt* – which was an act of defiance to the authority of the Prophet (S). In effect Walīd was claiming that they had turned apostate (*murtad*). The Prophet (S) resolved to fight them, but then this verse was revealed. When investigations was carried out, Walīd’s dishonesty was exposed.

People cannot be everywhere at once so they rely on other people to inform them of what is happening elsewhere. These sources as well as TV, newspapers, the internet, social media and emails, etc. must all be checked before acting on the information they relay.

2. ...in case you unwittingly hurt the interests of people and regret your conduct afterwards

The consequence of acting on unreliable and malicious news is that you may do injustice to innocent people. This can cause lasting damage to people’s lives, well-being and reputation.

Acting hastily on rumours will cause regret later.

3. The Evil of Lying according to the Qur'an and Hadith

In this verse, God warns us not to listen to an open sinner without investigation. If the Muslims had accepted the lies that their scout had brought to them, then a great evil would have occurred.

Lying has been condemned in the Qur'an and hadith and it has been described as one of the worst traits.

Lying is habit forming, and so the best way to avoid it is to always speak the truth, even if it is difficult at times.

There are many traditions from the Ma'sūmīn (A) about lying, some are quoted below:

Prophet (S): *From amongst God's punishment to the liar is forgetfulness (of the details of his lies.)*¹

Imam Ali (A): *Amongst the signs of faith (īmān) is that you prefer the truth even if it is against your interests, to falsehood even if it to your benefit.*²

Imam Ali (A): *Stay away determinedly from lies, both small and big; because when a person gets used to telling small lies he will gain the audacity to telling big lies.*³

In a tradition we have an interesting exception:

Imam al-Ṣādiq (A): *God the Almighty, likes lying when done to bring about peace between the believers and dislikes the truth when used to create discord amongst them.*⁴

In a beautiful tradition, Imam al-Ṣādiq (A) said: *Work hard and struggle (to get close to God). And even if you cannot do much, at least do not sin; because whoever builds and does not destroy, his building will rise even though it will be small. As for the one who builds and destroys, it is doubtful that his building will rise at all.*⁵

¹ Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1/11 | إِنَّ مِمَّا أَعَانَ اللَّهُ بِهِ عَلَى الْكُذَّابِينَ النَّسِيَّانَ

² *Nahj al-Balāgha*, short saying 458 | علامة الأيمان أن تُؤثِرَ الصِّدْقَ حَيْثُ يَضُرُّكَ عَلَى الْكُذِبِ حَيْثُ يَنْفَعُكَ

³ al-Harrānī, *Tuḥaf al-'Uqūl*, p. 278 | اتَّقُوا الْكُذِبَ الصَّغِيرَ مِنْهُ وَالْكَبِيرَ، فِي كُلِّ جِدٍّ وَهَزَلٍ فَإِنَّ الرَّجُلَ إِذَا كَذَبَ فِي الصَّغِيرِ اجْتَرَأَ عَلَى الْكَبِيرِ

⁴ Ṣadūq, *al-Faḥīh*, 4/353/5763 | إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ أَحَبَّ الْكُذِبَ فِي الصَّلَاحِ وَأَبْغَضَ الصِّدْقَ فِي الْفَسَادِ

⁵ Majlisī, *Biḥār*, 8/286 | جَدُّوا واجتهدوا، وإن لم تعملوا فلا تعصوا، فإن من يبنى ولا يهدم يرتفع بناؤه وإن كان يسيراً، وأن من يبنى ويهدم

يوشك أن لا يرتفع بناؤه