

EPISODE 22

Mohamed: Dear viewers, we welcome you to a new episode of our program, "Questions About Faith". We welcome our honorable guest Father Zakaria Botros.

F.Zakaria: Thank you

Mohamed: We received many questions about abrogation. One of them says that abrogation took place only in the case of commands and prohibitions - namely "do this and don't do that."

F Zakaria: I read this quite a number of times in the writings of the Islamic jurisprudence. But as a matter of fact, even if we assume that it only applies to the commands and prohibitions, still, what is the nature of these commands and prohibitions? For example, In Surah 9 (Al Towba) verse 5 and 29, we read the command "fight associators". This is the well known verse in the Surah of the sword. This Surah of the sword has abrogated 124 verses according to the testimony of all legal experts, who wrote about the abrogating and the abrogated. For example, Surah 9 (Al Towba) verse 29 says, "fight the people of the Book". How? The exact reading of the verse is as follows "fight the ones who do not believe in God, nor forbid whatever God and his messenger have forbidden, nor professed the true religion, among those who got the Book, until they pay the poll tax of their own accord and act submissive." Here is a command, "fight". It's a command that abrogated 124 other verses that speak about making peace, such as the verses: "do not argue with the people of the Book, except in the best of manners and say, we believe in that which was sent down to you, and in that which was sent down to us, and your God and our God is the same God." "You have your religion, and I have mine." Right? But here comes one verse that says, "Fight those who don't believe" and then what happened according to this command?

Mohamed: Does the verse say “fight those who believe” or “those who do not believe?”

F Zakaria: Who do not believe.

Mohamed: Who do not believe, O.K.

F Zakaria: Who do not believe in God, prohibit whatever God and his messenger have prohibited, nor profess the true religion, which is Islam.

Mohamed: And that means that any...

F Zakaria: Among the people of the Book. ***Yes,*** And this is the first occurrence; the very first mention that the people of the Book must be killed. Who are those people of the Book? The Christians and the Jews are the people of the Book.

Mohamed: Right.

F Zakaria: Here is a verse, just one command. You underestimate the abrogation of a command? And what was the effect of that command? Many wars broke out. Christians and Jews are fought, and the world was turned upside down, because of only one verse.

Mohamed: So you say that there are several abrogated verses that are not commands or prohibitions.

F Zakaria: Yes, that is true. There are such verses. We have been talking about the commands only like, "do not fight" and "fight". These are commands and prohibitions. But their consequences are very serious. Where is the God that.... That's a question. Forgive me, I'm not attacking Islam but I have this question that comes to my mind. What kind of God is this who would make a covenant with the Christians and the people of the Book and then commands that they be killed? Right? There are

verses that esteem Christians very highly. It says in the Quran, that God will raise those who follow Christ above those who disbelieve until the day of resurrection.

Mohamed: Who are those who disbelieve?

F Zakaria: It means the unbelievers, who associate others with God who don't believe in God, at all.

Mohamed: Another question that poses itself. Is it possible that God would favor his creation? Would He say, if you follow this religion I will be pleased with you, and if you don't you must die?

F Zakaria: The shift. The shift. From my reading and observations, I'm very sensitive in what I say so that no one would misunderstand me, and think that I am attacking Muslims or Islam. We love Muslims very much. We are just calling on them to think, and to try to solve these problems. Are you following with me? Yes. The problem is that Islam in Mecca was nonviolent but Islam in Medina was full of such verses about murder. But why? I have the right to ask.

Mohamed: O.K., then. Could you give us examples of verses that are not commands and prohibitions?

F Zakaria: Yes, of course. There are many.

Mohamed: Please tell us.

F. Zakaria For example, my dear friend, the verse about the semi-goddesses. In Surah 22 (Al Hajj) verse 52, it says "God will cancel out whatever Satan tampers with." What does this mean, "God will cancel out whatever Satan tampers with?" All Muslim commentaries say, when the Prophet was reciting Surah 53 (Al Najm) verse 20, where it says: "have you all considered Allat and Uzza and Manat, the other who ranks in third place".

At this point he says that Satan inserted these words, so he uttered: “those supreme semi-goddesses, their intercession is to be sought after.” All the people of Mecca knelt down, after him. He knelt down and they all knelt down following him. Supreme semi-goddesses? Does this mean reverence and their intercession is also to be sought after?

Mohamed: What does “semi-goddesses” mean?

F Zakaria: It means that they are higher beings. And who are those higher beings? They are Allat and Uzza and Manat, the idols. So the verse originally meant that those three semi-goddesses had privileges and honors and intercession. The idol worshiping people of Mecca were so pleased that the prophet Mohamed had confessed their goddesses. That's why they all worshiped or knelt down. Even those who could not kneel down took some dust in their hands and knelt over like that. They sent a message to the people who migrated to Ethiopia, to return.

Mohamed: But it is mentioned that Gabriel told him what Satan had inserted, and that he was saddened by it.

F Zakaria: Surely. And here comes “erasing”, because Gabriel told him that this was from Satan, so he was saddened, and he told the people that this was from Satan. And this is what is meant by “abrogation”. “God will cancel out or erase whatever the devil has dictated or inserted.” So abrogation is not limited to commands and prohibitions. That’s what I want to say; that abrogation was done to what the devil had revealed or dictated. So those who claim that abrogation happened only in the case of commands and prohibitions are actually wrong.

Mohamed: Are there verses that refer to the other heavenly books that were revealed prior to the Quran?

F Zakaria: Oh, yes

Mohamed: Mentioned?

F Zakaria: Of course.

Mohamed: Would you please share some of them with us?

F Zakaria: Yes, sure. The Meccan Surahs always praised the heavenly books that were revealed prior to Islam. For example, Surah 5 (Al Maeda) verse 43 says: "How can they choose you as a judge when they have the Torah which contains God's judgments?" Here the Quran shows respect and appreciation for the Torah and in the same Surah 5 verse 47, it says: "Let the people of the Gospel judge by what God had sent down in it." So the Gospel, as well, is respected. Surah 5 verse 48: "We have sent you down the Book with the truth to confirm what was already there in the previous Books" that is the Torah and the Gospel (Injeel). Now we come to abrogation. These are neither commands nor prohibitions. They're abrogated though. Surah 4 (Al Nisa'), verse 46 says: "Some persons who are Jews lift words out of their context". Lift words?

People take this verse as evidence of distortion in the Torah. But actually, what it says is that they lift words out of their places, which misinterprets the meaning. Surah 2 (Al Baqara), verse 75 says: "while a group of them already heard God's words, then they tamper with it." So they actually hear the words of God, which means the words of God are there and have not been changed, but they misrepresent them. So these are examples of the Surahs of the abrogated verses that were used to abrogate the Holy Scriptures that came before him, yet these verses are neither commands nor prohibitions. It is more serious than commands and prohibitions, they're entire books. It's a whole doctrine. You either believe those books or you don't. He simply cancelled the doctrine of belief in the Holy Scriptures.

Mohamed: But I recall a verse that says: "We ourselves have sent down the reminder (Zikr), just as we are safeguarding it." I do realize that " the reminder" is supposed to refer to the

Quran. But is it conceivable that God would safeguard or preserve His words at a certain period of time, and forget about His other words... I mean the other Holy Scriptures?

F Zakaria: This is one of the viable questions. At the same time the Bible - both the Old and the New Testaments - has been referred to as the reminder. Reminder, guidance and light. So why then, would God safeguard the reminder, which is the Quran, but not the Torah and the Gospel (Injeel)? This is one of the big question marks that the Muslim mind must think about. And not just any answer to these questions will be acceptable... You just remind me of something else. Abrogation is not even limited to commands and prohibitions; it goes even beyond that; to cancel out whole religions, the previous religions. At the beginning he showed respect to them. In Surah 2 (Al Baqara) verse 62, it says the following: "those who believe and those who are Jews, Christians and Sabiens, in fact anyone who believes in God, and the last day, and acts honorably will receive their earnings from their Lord, no fear will lie upon them nor need they feel saddened." No fear will lie upon them, the Christians and the Jews. And in Surah 29 (Al Ankaboot) verse 46: "Do not argue with the people of the Book unless it be in the politest manner, and say we believe in what has been sent down to us, and what has been sent down to you. Our God and your God is the same One." So we worship the same God. Again, it says in Surah 4 (Al Nisa'), verse 136: "Anyone who disbelieves in God and his angels, his books, his messengers and the last day will stray far afield." So he says here, whoever disbelieves in the messengers and the books, not just the Quran, has gone far astray.

Mohamed: Do you mean by this that these verses have been abrogated by other verses?

F Zakaria: Definitely.

Mohamed: And is this conceivable?

F Zakaria: Oh, yes. Let's have a look. In Surah 3 (Al Omran) verse 19: "Religion with God is Islam." He put aside all other religions. Again in Surah 3 (Al Omran) verse 85 it says: "Anyone who desires something other than Islam as a religion will never have it accepted from him, while in the hereafter he will be among the losers." This is cancellation of entire religions. So then, it's not commands and prohibitions? How come then at the beginning... Excuse me, I'm just asking. This is a question; I'm talking now to a big audience. I'm talking more to Muslims than I am to Christians. This is a religious debate. We want to live together peacefully; the world is too small for wars. We want peace and we want to live peacefully. When an Islamic extremist reads the Quran and finds a verse that says "Fight the Christians and the Jews," and that they are infidels, and that Islam is the only religion acceptable to God, I say, "There are earlier verses that command you to treat us peacefully. Why do you take only those violent ones? Why don't you choose to live in peace?" They say, "No this one has cancelled that one". So when this extremist or terrorist takes these verses of violence and says that they have cancelled the ones prior to it, isn't that what spreads terror in the whole world? That's why we are asking. I say to the people, please think. It requires thinking and use of the mind, which is God's gift to you. Right? You know it is more than just that. It's about religious freedom. Meccan Islam allowed religious freedom. It allowed people to believe in other religions. Medinan Islam has prohibited and cancelled all other religions. As an example, in Surah 109 (Al Kaferoon) verse 6 it says: "You have your religion while I have my religion." This means freedom. And in Surah 2 (Al Baqara) verse 256 it says: "There should be no compulsion in religion". This is what we hear in the media and in newspapers.

Mohamed: Yes, but what happens in practical life is totally different from this.

F Zakaria: You know why? Because it has been abrogated. They have a pretext. How was this abrogated then? Through the verses that cancelled religious freedom, such as Surah 3 (Al Omran) verse 19: "Religion with God is Islam." Surah 3 (Al Omran) verse 85. "Anyone who desires something other than Islam as a religion will never have it accepted from him, while in the hereafter he will be among the losers." and Surah 9 verse 29: "Fight the ones who do not believe in God, nor forbid whatever God and his messenger have forbidden nor professed the true religion, (that is Islam) among those who were given the Book." So this cancels religious freedom completely. What do you think?

Mohamed: *Actually, I have another question. Are there verses regarding the associators, I mean those who tampered with their religion?*

F Zakaria: Of course. If there are such verses as these about the people of the Book, then there must have previously been other verses talking about or encouraging tolerance, and then came those other verses that cancelled or abrogated tolerance. We are still talking about abrogation in the Quran.

Mohamed: *Can you prove Father, what you are saying?*

F Zakaria: Yes, definitely. Actually the verses are many, but I'll try to make it short because of the limited time of the program. In Surah 3 (Al Omran) verse 20, he says: "If they turn away you need merely to tell them the message." Namely, don't bother yourself. Leave them. If they listen, well and good. If they don't, you only have to tell them. And in Surah 5 (Al Maeda) verse 13, he says, "Yet pardon them and overlook them" Tolerance. All this was given in Mecca. And in Surah 8 (Al Anfal) verse 61, it says: "If they should incline to peace then incline to it too" We hear this a lot in the media. And it is true, but if you don't know about abrogation, you will not know that

all this fine talk has been abrogated. Now, what's the verse that cancelled it? Verse 89 of Surah 4(Al Nesaa) says: "If they turn away...". Previously, he said, "If they turn away you only tell them the message". In Surah 3(Al Omran) verse 20. But here in Surah 4, he says, "If they should turn away then seize them and kill them wherever you may find them." What more does a terrorist need than this? The terrorist must understand what this means in order to avoid doing it. What is needed from the scholars of the Islamic religion is to appear on the channels, and explain to the terrorists what this means. They should explain those verses, if there is any explanation. And again, in Surah 47 (Mohamed) verse 35, it says, "So do not waver and appeal for peace while you hold the upper hand". When you have the upper hand over the others, when you seize power, never call for peace. This is dangerous. This is drastic. These are all questions, Mr. Mohamed. I'm not giving my own explanation, I don't have that right to. I'm just a reader, I come across these books and I read them. I need answers to those questions, otherwise my mind will never be at peace and also for people who have terrorist inclinations, and they also need things explained to them... What do you think?

Mohamed: Yes, I agree with what you are asking. Is it conceivable that God would desire for 80% of his creation to be put to the sword? We know that the Muslim population is about 21% of the entire world. I pose this question to you, my viewers. Is it conceivable that God wants 80% of what He has created to be totally annihilated and wiped out? Is this conceivable?

F Zakaria: There is a more serious question here. Excuse me for saying that.

Mohamed: Go ahead.

F Zakaria: It follows from your question but it is more serious. God is the only judge. How can He give this divine prerogative

to men to liquidate each other? Couldn't it be that the one you're killing today, this infidel, the associater that you want to put to death now, if you wait a few days he may repent and come to recognize the truth? You're supposed to preach to him, talk to him and show him the way, not finish him off.

Mohamed: *I agree with you, because there is a verse in the Quran that says, "You can not guide those you love but God will guide whomever He wishes."*

F Zakaria: Yes, but this verse has been abrogated as well.

Mohamed: *Right.*

F Zakaria: Well we are still talking about abrogation, right?

Mohamed: *This is really very sad, but let's go on, because there are those who claim that abrogation is existent in all other religions and is not limited to the Quran alone. What's your opinion about that?*

F Zakaria: Ok. You know, you are echoing the voice of intellect. And the intellect is free to think, free to inquire, and also it has the right to be answered. It is very good to ask these questions, because these questions are actually the questions of the viewers, and we must answer as best as we know. **Go ahead.** I read a statement by Siouty; Galal El Deen Al Siouty in his book *Al Etkan Fi Ulum Al Quran* page 342. By the way, this book is on the internet, on the Warraq website.

Mohamed: *You can check it.*

F Zakaria: You can just click on it and find it.

Mohamed: *Would you repeat it again?*

F Zakaria: The WARAK website. www.Alwarak.com
Just click it on the internet, and you'll get it, so just have a look at it. What does Al Siouty say? We know that he is a well known scholar: "God singled out abrogation to this Islamic nation alone. Muslims have all agreed to its permissibility or validity" so Muslims have all agreed about its permissibility. So then, abrogation has to do with the Islamic nation and the Quran only.

Mohamed: *O.K., then. According to your Biblical knowledge, there is no abrogation in the Bible or in Christianity.*

F Zakaria: We are accused of having abrogation.

Mohamed: *But this is not*

F Zakaria: This issue requires understanding. I don't like those who just say "No, we don't have such a thing." You can't just answer and say, "No we don't have it." We should think, "Why don't we have abrogation? O.K. For example, we are told that Christ abrogated the judgments of the Old Testament. Through the sermon on the mount, He abrogated the Old Testament. "You heard what it said, but I say ..." They say this is abrogation. As a matter of fact the issue requires a bit of understanding, you can't just issue superficial judgments at random like that. The Lord Jesus said with his own mouth, "I have not come to abolish the Law, that is the Old Testament, but to complete the Law." Abolish is the same as abrogate. If He himself said, "I have not come to abrogate the Law, but rather to fulfill or complete the Law". Why, then? The Old Testament was a mere law, full of "does" and "don'ts". If you don't do that, this will happen to you. But this did not cure the very nature of man. Christ came to restore or cure the nature of man, to grant a new heart, a new nature, a new spirit, to completely transform man.

Mohamed: *How can this happen?*

F Zakaria: Well, this is the crux of the message. Let me tell you something. The Bible says, "If there be anybody in Christ, he is a new creation." The advantage of the work of Christ is that He doesn't give me a set of "does" and "don'ts". No, He rather changes my nature from the inside when He comes in and dwells inside of me. He says "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If someone hears my voice and opens the door, I come in to him."

Mohamed: *What door?*

F Zakaria: The door of your heart. "I come in to him and I will dine with him."

Mohamed: *You are not talking about food?*

F Zakaria: Of course not. Christianity uses a lot of figures of speech; it uses a lot of metaphors and rhetoric. So this talks about opening your heart to Christ willingly, and receiving Him, which results in an enjoyable fellowship.

Mohamed: *Namely, he is talking about the Spirit, not the flesh.*

F Zakaria: Yes, of course, not the flesh.

Mohamed: *Yes. Go ahead.*

F Zakaria: The Bible says, "Your Words were found and I ate them, and your Word was for me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." So then when I say to God, "Lord, You who are looking for me, I need you. I'm tormented, I'm worn out, I'm perplexed, I'm at a loss. It is good that You are knocking at the door of my heart. And I willingly open it, and welcome you in. Enter into my life. Transform it. Change my heart, change my mind, and change my nature. At that point man is transformed, from a wolf to a lamb. He becomes a new man. And there are many examples of this.

Mohamed: Can any person do this?

F Zakaria: Definitely.

Mohamed: Then the door to repentance is open to all. Not limited to the Christian only.

F Zakaria: No. The Bible says, “God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, so that those who believe in Him will not perish but have eternal life”. God is ready to receive and accept any man from any background and under any circumstance and in whatever manner, because we’re the creation of His hands. We are dear to Him. He desires that we be saved. Christ is ready to save man, He is willing to change his entire existence and his entire life, only if man accepts and asks. So, in Christianity there is no abrogation. Christianity is Spirit and Life. Christianity is the completion of the Old Testament Law that contained only sets of does and don'ts and the turning of it into life. The Bible says, “The Law has been given by Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” And “By grace you are saved.” What is grace? It means a free gift from God. A loving Father giving gifts to His children, whatever they need. But it is up to man to receive the gift.

Mohamed: What a beautiful expression, a “loving Father”.

F Zakaria: A Father. Right.

Mohamed: There is a question that arises here, which I also had been asking as a child, I remember when I used to ask our religion teacher. There were certain questions concerning God or about religion itself, I always heard the answer: HARAM, (prohibited, or interdicted.) This question is impermissible and I am sure there are many people who have the same questions. And my question is, we even received this question. "Can someone object to God and say, why did you do so?"

F Zakaria: Of course, man cannot object to God. The expression itself is improper. But it is man's right though, to understand. Why did God create man with a mind, had he not wanted him to understand? He could operate man with a remote control. Why has He given him a mind to start with?

Mohamed: *So it isn't interdicted to ask God such questions?*

F Zakaria: Not at all. God Himself said "Ask and you will be given, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened to you."

But allow me to say that, and I want to repeat, I am not attacking, not attacking but simply inquiring. The Quran says "You who believe do not ask about such things as would offend you".

Mohamed: *Right. Thank you, but we are running out of time. Dear viewers we will try to answer this question in the next episode as well as your new questions.*

You will see the address on the screen. We also welcome all of your questions. And if you want to get a copy of the Bible, it will be our pleasure to send it to you for free. Questions that I was asking since my young age. Do you have another question about God? Thank you, and till we meet again.

F Zakaria: Thank you very much.