

“Do not forget to be bountiful towards each other”¹

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The Friday sermon delivered at the Umayyad mosque, Damascus, on the 4th Rabi al-akhir 1431 (after Hejira) which corresponds to the 19th March 2010 (CE).

Praised be God. Praised be God. Praised be God; a praise commensurate to His bounties and equivalent to His plentiful blessings. O our Lord, for you is praise befitting Your sublime essence and Your majestic Dominion. Transcendent are You; O God I am unable to enumerate Your exaltations, for You are as You exalt Yourself. I testify that there is no deity except God alone, who has no partner, and I testify that Muhammad is His slave, His Messenger, and His pure and intimate friend; the best Prophet God sent. God sent him to the whole world as a bearer of glad tidings and as a warner. O God send your mercy, peace, and blessings upon our master Muhammad and upon the family of our master Muhammad²; continuous peace and blessings that last until the Day of Judgment.

I exhort you, O Muslims, and my wrongful self, to fear³ God, the Exalted.

O slaves of God, part of a verse from the Book of God, the Transcendent and Sublime, has held my attention me for a long time. The verse is the speech of God, the Transcendent and Sublime, **"To remit is nearer to piety⁴. Do not forget to be bountiful towards each other. For God sees well all that you do."** The part of the verse is the Speech of God, the Mighty and Majestic, **" Do**

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1. A translation of the meaning of a verse from the Qur'an: chapter no 2: verse no. 237: i.e. Q (2:237).
 2. An invocation that is recited each time the name of the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned.
 3. The Arabic term "*taqwa*" is often translated as fear or piety. It is a concept that may be defined as following the commands of God and avoiding His prohibitions with reverence and awe for the majesty of God. *Taqwa* gives rise to the protection of God.
 4. see note 3

not forget to be bountiful towards each other”. If we wanted to discuss the meanings and principles that just this sentence from this magnificent verse encompasses, then we would be pressed for time and perhaps a whole book could be written. Yet ‘that which is not completely attained is not completely relinquished.’ So let us touch upon a summary of the significance this sentence and excerpt from the Qur'anic verse, **"Do not forget to be bountiful towards each other."**

God, the Transcendent and Sublime, loves to spread the bond of friendship between His slaves; the bond of love and affection and as a consequence the bond of mutual assistance. How has God, the Transcendent and Sublime, made it easy to for this bond to be extended amongst all His slaves? The way willed and decreed by God is that no human, whomsoever he may be- besides the Messengers and Prophets- is protected from mistakes, faults and wrongdoing. Just as God, the Transcendent and Exalted, willed that virtues and the fundamentals of sublime character be distributed amongst His slaves, He also willed that a portion of it be spread between them all. Hence the Maker, the Majestic and Mighty, in his dazzling wisdom, has extricated the human, whomsoever he may be, from competing with his peers and brothers in being free from error; a state impossible for man to achieve as people are sinful as we have been informed by the Chosen One, may God send his peace and blessings upon him and his family, and the best of the sinful are those that return to their Lord repentant.

Similarly it makes no sense for the human, whomsoever he may be- and I always exclude the Messengers and Prophets- to brag about a virtues such as uprightness and adherence to the fundamentals of good character that God, the Majestic and Mighty, has granted him. It is not sensible for him to compete with others, with regards to such matters, since just as he considers that God has blessed him with these virtues he must know that others have been granted contrasting virtues that have eluded him and that he does not enjoy. Hence it is inexcusable for man to be lulled into preferring himself over the rest of all the slaves of God simply because he is upstanding in the face of His commands and unwavering from His path. Who

“Do not forget to be bountiful towards each other”

Dr al-Buti

does he think he is, the human daring to lay claim to this? The Maker, the Majestic and Mighty, has saved all his slaves from this pitfall. God, the Transcendent and Sublime, has delivered all His slaves from the hazard of bragging about being blessed with virtuous character that others have not been granted. If he has benefited from virtuous character then God, the Mighty and Majestic, has most certainly ennobled others with virtuous character and praiseworthy features that have escaped him. Transcendent be the One Who distributes gifts amongst His slaves and in a similar fashion distributes the trials of deficiencies in their midst.

When I look at you, it is necessary that I prefer you to myself as I find that you have been granted praiseworthy virtues that I do not enjoy and when I look closer I find that you have been protected from many of the aberrations that afflict me. Likewise when you look at me you will prefer me to yourself because you will find that I have been blessed with some virtues, and their adornments, that have eluded you, and perhaps you will find me free from some of the defects that burden you. In this way people give preference to each other. This is a summary of the meaning of the verse, **"Do not forget to be bountiful towards each other"**.

Do not forget that I have distinguished each one of you over each other. Do not forget that when one of you thanks God for a blessing, God honours him with good character. Do not forget that your brothers are bestowed with virtues that you do not enjoy. Do not forget that if you see one of your brothers, those whose predicaments you scrutinise, brought down by heavy loads then know that you too could be tried by the same if not all of the same burdens. This is our stance in front of the majestic and grand meaning of His words, “ **Do not forget to be bountiful towards each other**” after He, the Transcendent and Sublime said, **“To remit is nearer to piety”**. This is the means, willed by God, of spreading the bond of friendship, the bond of love and the bond of mutual assistance and harmony between all the slaves of God.

O slaves of God, what I have told you is a way from amongst the ways of God that we read in His masterly exposition. Only the arrogant are excepted from this standard which I have mentioned to you in summary; the arrogant is the one whose arrogance destroys all virtues and praiseworthy attributes. On the Day of Judgement you will not come across any praiseworthy virtues in the arrogant; nothing to intercede for them. God speaks the truth, **“I shall turn away from My signs those who act arrogantly, without right, in the earth; and who, if they see each sign, believe it not; and if they see the way of righteousness, chose it not as their way; and if they see the way of error choose it for their way.”**⁵

The declaration of God, the Mighty and Majestic, in a short sentence of a majestic verse, erects a foundational principle of praiseworthy character in front of us; enjoining it upon us all. God, the Mighty and Majestic, demands from me and you, when reflecting upon the reality of our brothers and their behaviour, that we discern their virtues to emulate them. He demands that we do not search out and forage for their faults into wrongdoing such that our tongues find fault in them. This is the meaning, or rather a meaning, from amongst the implied meanings of this verse addressed to us by God, the Transcendent and Sublime. When you deal with your brothers, become acquainted with them and connect with them and search for pious virtues that God has bestowed them that have eluded you. This is what will benefit you.

Beware not to avert your face from the virtues that your brother has been blessed with, for he has been blessed with many virtues, and to glean the defects and faults into which he has fallen. If you are from the impeccable angels then that would be appropriate for you. However you know that you are from those whom the way of the Lord of the worlds, the Transcendent and Sublime, holds true; expressed by the speech of the Chosen One, May God send His peace and blessings upon him, “All the children of Adam are sinful” and expressed by the

5. T (7:146)

Divine declaration, “**and Man was created weak**”⁶. It is not for you to swagger around on a par with angels and then to use a magnifying glass to forage into your brothers’ faults and defects. It pleases me to quote a verse of Imam Shafi’ as evidence, even though scholars of law may dislike the use of poetry at this point, “Your tongue, do not use to disclose man’s private parts, For all of you is private and men have eyes”.

This is the reality that the Book of God makes apparent to us and it is a praiseworthy human characteristic that, due to its importance, is valued higher than many acts of obedience and worship.

On account of this reality, O slaves of God, the following proverb has been proved true, “Everyone you see, believe him to be Khidr⁷”. When you see someone astray in disobedience or drawn into evil or vile temperament then I caution you against judging him, or where he is heading, on the basis of what you see. Rather say to yourself and have certainty, in your heart, that this person may return to God as a friend from amongst His friends and he is Khidr himself. If you see someone not characterised by Divine protection, in whom you are able to enumerate a few defects and deviations then avert your face from his deviations and search for virtues in his being. You will find in him virtues that you desperately need. So have good opinion of him and believe that he may well be Khidr. If he is not Khidr today then perhaps he ultimately ends up attaining the same standing as Khidr tomorrow.

You all know, as I do, that many people live for a long time of their lives deviant, astray and adhering to all sorts of transgression then God rescues them. He saves them with abundant bounty such that they return to God, the Transcendent and Sublime, as His beloved friends. All of us know someone who proves this matter to be true. So are you sure that those you see astray and deviant will not be saved

6. Q (4:28)

7. *Khidr*: God says that he is, “one of Our slaves on whom We had bestowed mercy from Ourselves, and whom We had taught knowledge from Our own Presence”. His encounter with the Prophet Moses is related in Q (18:60-82)

by God, the Mighty and Majestic, by the intercession of praiseworthy character that they have been bestowed? By the mediation of being upright upon some virtues that have God, in His mercy and loving kindness, has distributed amongst His slaves. Are you convinced that those you disparage will not return to God, the Transcendent and Sublime, except with a good ending? How was Fudayl ibn Iyad⁸ in his youth? And Bishr al-Hafi⁹? How many of the righteous, whose merits we celebrate, were astray in their first few days? Malik ibn Dinar¹⁰, the aid of the Sultan in the marketplace, how was he and how did he become?

I give the following advice to you and myself. Do not be so sure of the plan of God, the Mighty and Majestic. Especially if you vie with each other in boasting about your rectitude and some of the gifts that God, the Mighty and Majestic, has bestowed. Are you certain that you will not falter at just one of the causes of divine displeasure; such that God rules upon you a miserable ending after you had travelled the path of happiness? **“No one can feel secure from the Plan of God, except the losers”**¹¹ and the disbelievers as well.

This, O brothers, is a little of what is indicated in the speech of God, **“Do not forget to be bountiful towards each other”**.

When I look at those astray from amongst the slaves of God, I almost want to greet one of them and ask him to pray to God for me in secret. Perhaps in secret he will cry, suffering, for help from God. Perhaps in secret he will shrink in fear, constricted, and perhaps tears will dissolve the last remnants of evil that enveloped him. Perhaps God, the Mighty and Majestic, will intercede for him on the Day of Judgement simply on account of what I have told you.

8. Fudayl ibn Iyad (d. 187 AH): a brigand who repented and studied under Sufyan al-Thawri and Abu Hanifa

9. Bishr ibn al-Harith al-Hafi (d. 227 AH): known for his unruly living prior to repenting and becoming a companion of Fudayl ibn Iyad

10. Malik ibn Dinar al-Naji (d. 131 AH): A companion of al-Hasan al-Basri who became an ascetic, earning a living copying the Qur'an.

11. Q (7:99)

“Do not forget to be bountiful towards each other”

Dr al-Buti

I ask God, the Sublime and Transcendent, to make us confront our mistakes returning to Him repentant and to make us thankful for the righteous actions that he has bestowed us. I deliver this sermon and seek the forgiveness of God, the Majestic.