

## Aqeedah Corner: Is man free to choose between right and wrong?

This article follows a series of articles dealing with issues related to the Islamic aqeedah (belief). This article is aimed at clarifying a popular misconception among Muslims regarding the actions of man. Is man free to choose between right and wrong, or has he been forced to accept or reject the truth? Before answering this question, I have chosen to examine several Ayah that have often been misquoted. It is hoped that such an approach will help clarify any confusion that may arise in the mind of the reader.

In Surat Al-Araf:34 Allah says, "To every people is a term appointed; when their term is reached, not an hour can they cause delay nor an hour can they advance (in anticipation)."

In Surat Al-Hadeed:22 He says, "No misfortune can happen on earth or in your souls but it is recorded in a decree before We bring it into existence; that is truly easy for Allah."

In Surat At-Taubah:51 He says, "Say: nothing will happen to us except what Allah has decreed for us; He is our protector and in him let the believers put their trust."

In Surat Saba:3 He says, "From whom is not hidden the least little atom in the heavens or the earth, nor is there anything less than that or greater, but it is in record perspicuous."

In Surat An-Nisa:78 He says, "if some good befalls them they say: This is from Allah but if evil, they say: this is from thee (O prophet), say: All things are from Allah, but what hath come to these people that they fail to understand a single fact?"

These verses and others similar to them are used as evidences by many in a way that implies man is compelled to undertake his actions, and he undertakes the actions by the will and decree of Allah (SWT), and Allah has created man and his actions. They support their conclusions by what Allah (SWT) says, "But Allah has created you and your handiwork."

However, it should be noted none of the above verses address the question under discussion. The subjects of these verses can be identified as:

1. The knowledge of Allah (SWT)
2. The will of Allah (SWT) which is related to the slave's actions.
3. The protected decree.
4. Deeds are created by Allah (SWT).

The subject of our inquiry is none of the above. Our concern here is whether we have been allowed a choice in our actions or not. This is important because our actions will be judged in the hereafter and based on this we will either be rewarded or punished. In order to understand the issue of man's control over his actions, we need to observe the reality and put things in perspective.

We observe that in reality events occur and fall into two distinguishable categories. Those that are influenced by man's will and those that lie outside of man's control. Events that fall in the second category are either necessitated by the laws of the universe (e.g., sunrise and sunset, earthquakes, etc.) or occur unintentionally (accidents). Man has therefore, no control over such events. In the first category man decides the outcome and therefore, is responsible for his deeds. Thus he walks, eats, drinks and travels any time he likes and refrains from doing them if he wishes. Therefore, man is free to carry out an action or abstain from it by the discriminative mind which Allah (SWT) endowed him with. It is the mind that is responsible for legal accountability, Allah (SWT) will reward man for doing good and punish him for doing an evil deed. Thus his charge is righteous and just because He gave man a choice and the ability to distinguish between right (Haq) and wrong (Batil). Allah (SWT) says, "Every soul is a pledge for its deeds", thereby, emphasizing that we are responsible for what we do.

Indeed the knowledge of Allah (SWT) is all encompassing and nothing is hidden from Him. But this knowledge does not compel us to carry out an action. Similarly, nothing can happen without the will of Allah (SWT). Therefore, if Allah (SWT) gave man the permission to act freely, in

certain areas, then man has only complied with His decree, and not gone against it, for that is impossible.

In conclusion, there is no contradiction in man having a choice in his actions, and the verses that deal with Allah's knowledge and power. In truth the two are separate issues and hence should be understood as such.

*by Tauqeer Ansari*

Ar-Raya Magazine, March 1992