

“Oh My servants, each of you is astray except those I have guided, so ask me for guidance and I will guide you” – Imam Ibn Rajab



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allāh, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī's book, "Jāmi' al-'Ulūm wal-Ḥikam," is an explanation of the forty-two famous ḥadīth collected by Imām an-Nawawī. In this article, part of the twenty-fourth ḥadīth of that book explained.

The Explanation of:

يَا . يَا عِبَادِي كُلُّكُمْ جَائِعٌ إِلَّا مَنْ أَطْعَمْتُهُ، فَاسْتَطْعِمُونِي أَطْعِمَكُمْ . إِلَّا مَنْ هَدَيْتُهُ، فَاسْتَهْدُونِي أَهْدِكُمْ يَا عِبَادِي كُلُّكُمْ ضَالٌّ إِلَّا مَنْ كَسَوْتُهُ، فَاسْتَكْسُونِي أَكْسِكُمْ

“Oh my servants, each of you is astray except those I have guided, so ask me for guidance and I will guide you. Oh my servants, each of you is hungry except those I have fed, so ask me for food and I will feed you. Oh my servants, each of you is naked except those I have clothed, so ask me for clothing and I will clothe you.”

This is an indication that all creatures are dependent upon Allah for their well-being and for protection from harm in all of their affairs whether religious or worldly. The servants of Allah possess nothing of these things themselves (without Allah’s assistance).

Whoever has not been graced with the bounties of guidance and sustenance will be deprived of them in this life. And whoever has not been graced by Allah’s forgiveness of his sins, his misdeeds will ruin him in the hereafter. Allah (تَعَالَى) says:

مُرْشِدًا وَلِيًّا لَهُ تَجَدَّ فَلَنْ يُضِلَّ وَمَنْ أَلْمَهْتِدِ فَهُوَ اللَّهُ يَهْدِي مَنْ
Whomever Allah guides is rightly-guided, but whomever he leaves astray,
you will never find for him a protecting guide. [Sūrah al-Kahf, 18:17]

There are many similar examples in the Quran. All also says:

زِيْرُ مَا يَفْتَحُ اللَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ مِنْ رَحْمَةٍ فَلَا مُمْسِكٍ لَهَا وَمَا يُمْسِكُ فَلَا مُرْسِلَ لَهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَهُوَ الْعَلِيمُ
الْحَكِيمُ

Whatever Allah grants to people of mercy, none can withhold it; and whatever he withholds, none can release it thereafter. And he is the Mighty, the Wise. [Sūrah Fāṭir, 35:2]

And:

رَزَقَهَا اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ إِلَّا الْأَرْضِ فِي دَابَّةٍ مِنْ وَمَا
And there is no creature on earth but that (dependent) upon Allah is its
provision. [Sūrah Hūd, 11:6]

And Allah says, quoting the prayer of Adam (the prophet and first of mankind) and his wife (عَلَيْهِمَا السَّلَام) :

الْخَاسِرِينَ مِنْ لَنْكُونَنَّ وَتَرْحَمْنَا لَنَا تَغْفِرْ لَمْ إِنْ وَأَنْفُسَنَا ظَلَمْنَا رَبَّنَا قَالَا
They said, “Our lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if you do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers.” [Sūrah al-A’rāf, 7:23]

And quoting Noah, the prophet and first messenger (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَام) , Allah says:

الْخَاسِرِينَ مَنْ أَكُنْ وَتَرْحَمْنِي لِي تَغْفِرْ وَإِلَّا

“And unless you forgive me and have mercy upon me, I will be among the losers.” [Sūrah Hūd, 11:47]

Abraham (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَام), the prophet, messenger, and close friend of Allah, made reference to such affairs being dependent upon Allah as proof that nothing should be worshipped except Allah, and that anything else worshipped besides him is done in falsehood. Abraham said to his people:

هُوَ الَّذِي يَهْدِين فَهُوَ خَلَقَنِي الَّذِي الْعَالَمِينَ رَبِّ إِلَّا لِي عَدُوٌّ فَإِنَّهُمْ الْأَقْدَمُونَ وَأَبَاؤُكُمْ أَنْتُمْ تَعْبُدُونَ كُنْتُمْ مَا أَقْرَأْتُمْ قَالَ رَبِّ الدِّينِ يَوْمَ خَطِيبَتِي لِي يَغْفِرَ أَنْ أَطْمَعُ وَالَّذِي يُخَيِّبُنِي ثُمَّ يَمِيتُنِي يَا وَالَّذِي يَشْفِينِي فَهُوَ مَرَضْتُ وَإِذَا وَيَسْقِينِي يُطْعِمُنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ وَالْحَجْفِينِي حُكْمًا لِي هَبْ

He said, “Then do you see what you have been worshipping, you and your forefather of old? They are enemies to me, except the lord of the worlds. And it is He who created me and who guides me, the one who feeds me and gives me drink. When I become sick, it is he who heals me, and he who will cause me to die then give me life again. It is he, I hope, will forgive me for my sins on the Day of Judgment. My lord, grant me authority and join me with the righteous.” [Sūrah al-Shu’arā, 26:75-83]

So the one who alone creates people, guides them, provides them with their sustenance, gives them life and death in this life and forgiveness of their sins in the hereafter—he alone deserves to be singled out as the only god, the only one deserving of worship, prayer and supplication, and humble submission. Allah (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ) says:

عَمَّا وَتَعَالَى سُبْحَانَهُ شَيْءٍ مِّنْ ذَلِكَ مِمَّنْ يَفْعَلُ مِمَّنْ شُرَكَائِكُمْ مِنْ هَلْ يُحْيِيكُمْ ثُمَّ يَمِيتُكُمْ ثُمَّ رَزَقَكُمْ ثُمَّ خَلَقَكُمْ الَّذِي اللَّهُ يُشْرِكُونَ

Allah is the one who created you, then provided for you, then will cause you to die and then will give you life. Are there any of your “partners” (you worship along with him) who does anything of that? Exalted is he and high above what they associate (in worship) with him. [Sūrah al-Rūm, 30:40]

And there are ḥadīth that show Allah loves for his servants to pray and ask for anything contributing to the well-being of their religion or worldly life such as food, drink, clothing, and similar things just as they would ask him for guidance and forgiveness. [22]

Yet some of the Salaf used to be ashamed before Allah to ask him anything of worldly affairs. But following the Sunnah is better and preferable.

As for the statement in the ḥadīth, “each of you is astray except those I have guided,” some people found this to be in contradiction to another ḥadīth in which the prophet (اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ صَلَّى) said:

الشَّيَاطِينُ فَاجْتَالَتْهُمْ (مُسْلِمِينَ) : رَوَايَةٌ وَفِي (حُنَفَاءَ عِبَادِي خَلَقْتُ : وَجَلَّ عَزَّ اللَّهُ يَقُولُ

Allah (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ) said, “I have created my servants inclining to believe in the truth (and in another narration: “as Muslims”) but the devils misled them.” [Recorded by Muslim (no. 2865)]

But there is actually no contradiction here. Allah created all the children of Adam with an innate nature to accept (the monotheism of) Islam, to be more inclined toward it as opposed to any other belief, and to be predisposed and prepared with the capacity for accepting it. However, a servant must still take the action to learn Islam; without actually learning about it, he is ignorant, knowing nothing of it just as Allah (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ) says:

شَيْئًا تَعْلَمُونَ لَا أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ بُطُونَ مِّنْ أَخْرَجَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ

And Allah has brought you out of your mothers' wombs not knowing anything. [Sūrah al-Nahl, 16:78]

And he said to his prophet (ﷺ):

فَهَدَىٰ صَالًا وَوَجَدَكَ

And he found you lost but he guided you. [Sūrah al-Duḥá, 93:7]

The preceding verse means that he found you while you had no knowledge of the book (the Quran) and wisdom (the Sunnah) as He (تَعَالَى) says:

مِن نَّشَاءٍ مَّن بِهِ نَهْدِي نُورًا جَعَلْنَاهُ وَلَكِن الْإِيمَانَ وَلَا الْكِتَابُ مَا تَذْرِي كُنْتَ مَا أَمَرْنَا مِّن رُّوحًا إِلَيْكَ أَوْحَيْنَا وَكَذَلِكَ عِبَادِنَا

And thus we have revealed to you an inspiration by our command. You neither knew what the book was nor faith, but we have (now) made it a light by which we guide whomever we will of our servants. [Sūrah al-Shūrā, 45:52]

So people are born with a natural inclination to accept and believe in truth. If Allah then guides them then that is the reason they know guidance and become guided in action after they were guided at birth with the inclination and capacity to accept truth and guidance. But for whomever Allah has abandoned, he will be destined to learn from those who would teach him beliefs that would change his natural disposition. This is similar to the statement of the prophet (ﷺ):

وَيَمَجِّسَانِهِ وَيَتَصَّرَانِهِ يَهُودَانِهِ فَأَبَوَاهُ الْفِطْرَةَ، عَلَى يَوْلَادٍ مَّوْلُودٍ كُلِّ

Every newborn is born upon the natural disposition, but his parents may then raise him as a Jew, as a Christian, or as a Zoroastrian.

[Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 1358) and Muslim (no. 2658)]

As for a believer asking Allah for guidance, guidance is of two types:

General Guidance: This type is the guidance to Islam, faith and this occurs only with believers.

Specific Guidance: This second type is the guidance to knowing the details of faith and belief of Islam and Allah’s assistance in acting in accordance with those details. Every believer needs this type of guidance night and day. And this is why Allah instructs his worshippers to recite in every prayer:

المُسْتَقِيمَ الصِّرَاطِ إِهْدِنَا

Guide us to the straight path. [Sūrah al-Fātiḥah, 1:5]

And the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) used to say in one of his nighttime supplications:

مُسْتَقِيمٍ صِرَاطٍ إِلَى تَشَاءُ مَنْ تَهْدِي إِنَّكَ ، بِإِذْنِكَ الْحَقِّ مِنْ فِيهِ اخْتَلَفَ لِمَا أَهْدِنِي

Guide me, in matters that are inconsistent with the truth, by your permission. You certainly guide whomever you will to a straight path. [Recorded by Muslim (no. 770)]

Similarly, the one who sneezes to which another replies, “May Allah have mercy on you,” should say, “May Allah guide you,” as has been narrated in the Sunnah.[30] And although some scholars (of the past) of Iraq rejected this under the assumption that one does not need to ask for guidance for a Muslim, most scholars differ with them by following the Sunnah in this matter.

Regarding this specific guidance, the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) also instructed ‘Alī to ask Allah for correctness and guidance.[31] And he (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) instructed al-Ḥasan to say in the supplication during the Witr Prayer:

هَدَيْتَ فِيمَنْ أَهْدَيْتَ لِلَّهِمَا

Allah, guide me with those you have guided.[32]

Foot Notes:

[22] As some examples of such ḥadīth, the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

عَلَيْهِ يَغْضَبُ تَعَالَى اللهُ يَسْأَلُ لَمْ مَنْ إِنَّهُ

Indeed, whoever does not ask Allah (تَعَالَى), he becomes angry with him.

[Recorded in “Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan al-Tirmidhī” (no. 2686) and “Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan Ibn Mājah” (no. 3085) by al-Albānī]

And he (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

عَاءِ الدُّعَا عَنِ عَجَزَ مِنَ النَّاسِ أَعْجَزُ

The most deficient of people is he who fails to supplicate. [Recorded in “Silsilah al-Aḥādīth al-Ṣaḥīḥah” (no. 601) by al-Albānī]

And the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) also instructed:

يَتَيَسَّرَ لَمْ يُيَسِّرْهُ لَمْ يَنْجَلْ عَزَّ اللهُ فَإِنَّ الشُّسْعَ ، حَتَّى شَيْءٍ كُلَّ اللهُ سَلُّوا

Ask Allah for everything, even for a shoe strap. For if Allah (وَجَلَّ عَزَّ) did not make such a thing easy, it would certainly not be easy.

[See al-Albānī’s statements about no. 21 of his “Silsilah al-Aḥādīth al-Ḍa’īfah”]

And he (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

الدُّعَاءُ مِنْ تَعَالَى اللهِ عَلَى أَكْرَمِ شَيْءٍ لَيْسَ

There is nothing more honorable to Allah (تَعَالَى) than supplication.

[Recorded in “Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan al-Tirmidhī” (no. 2684) and “Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan Ibn Mājah” (no. 3087) by al-Albānī]

[30] See “Ṣaḥīḥ al-Wābil al-Sayyib” (pgs. 237-238).

[31] In a ḥadīth, recorded by Muslim (no. 2725), ‘Alī (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) said: The prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) instructed me:

السَّهْمُ سَدَادٌ وَبِالسَّدَادِ الطَّرِيقَ هَدَايَتِكَ بِالْهُدَى وَادْكُرْ وَسَدِّدْنِي أَهْدِنِي اللَّهُمَّ : قُلْ

Say, “Allah, guide me and correct me,” intending thereby with “your guidance,” the guidance of (a traveler on) a path, and with “correctness,” the straightness of an arrow.

[32] This ḥadīth is recorded by Abū Dāwūd (no. 1425) and al-Albānī said it is authentic in “Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan Abī Dāwūd” (no. 1263). It is also recorded by al-Tirmidhī (no. 464), al-Nasāī (3/248), and Ibn Mājah (no. 1178). Ahmad Shākir also said it is authentic in his notes of “Sunan al-Tirmidhī.”

The full Qunūt supplication is:

قَضَيْتَ مَا شَرَّ وَفِينِي ، أَعْطَيْتَ فِيمَا لِي أَرْكَوِبَ ، تَوَلَّيْتَ فِيمَنْ وَتَوَلَّيْتَنِي ، عَافَيْتَ فِيمَنْ وَعَافَيْتَنِي ، هَدَيْتَ فِيمَنْ أَهْدَيْتَنِي اللَّهُمَّ ، وَتَعَالَيْتَ رَبَّنَا تَبَارَكْتَ ، عَادَيْتَ مَنْ يَعْرِ وَلَا ، وَالْأَيْتَ مَنْ يَدُلُّ لَا وَإِنَّهُ ، عَلَيْكَ يُعْصَى وَلَا تَقْضِي إِنَّكَ ،

Oh Allah, guide me with those you have guided. Heal me with those you have healed. Care for me with those you have cared for. Bless me in what you have given, and protect me from the evil of what you have decreed. Indeed, you decree while no one decrees against you. Whomever you show loyalty towards will never be humiliated, and whomever you show enmity towards will never be honored. Blessed are you, our lord, and you are exalted far above (any weakness).

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