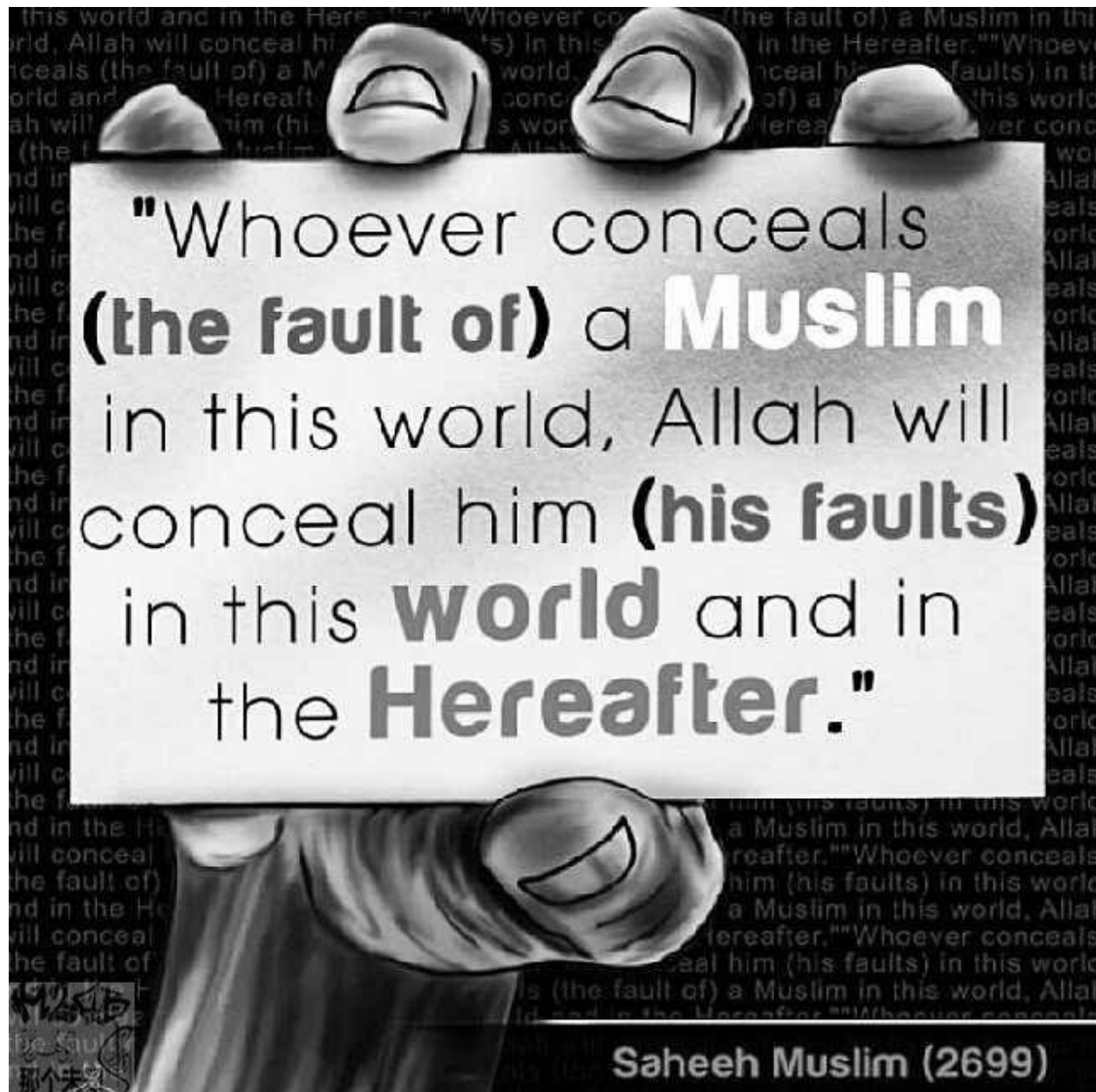


Whoever conceals (the faults of) a Muslim, Allah will conceal him in this life and the hereafter – Imam Ibn Rajab



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The Explanation of:

وَالْآخِرَةَ الدُّنْيَا فِي اللَّهِ سَتَرَهُ مُسْلِمًا سَتَرَ وَمَنْ

“Whoever conceals (the faults of) a Muslim, Allah will conceal him in this life and the hereafter.”

This is another point that is emphasized by other texts with similar meanings. Ibn Mājah recorded a ḥadīth from Ibn ‘Abbās (رضي الله عنه) that the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

حَتَّى عَوْرَتَهُ اللَّهُ كَشَفَ الْمُسْلِمَ أَخِيهِ عَوْرَةَ كَشَفَ وَمَنْ ، الْفِيَامَةِ يَوْمَ عَوْرَتَهُ اللَّهُ سَتَرَ الْمُسْلِمَ أَخِيهِ عَوْرَةَ سَتَرَ مَنْ بَيْتِهِ فِيهَا يَقْضَحُهُ

Whoever conceals the faults of his Muslim brother, Allah will conceal his faults on the Day of Resurrection. And whoever exposes the faults of his Muslim brother, Allah will expose his faults even by revealing those he committed in (the privacy of) his home.[22]

It is reported that some of the Salaf said something similar:

I have met people having no shameful faults but they began to mention the faults of others, so the people began discovering their faults. And I met people who had faults, yet they used to conceal other people’s faults, so their own faults were forgotten.

The ḥadīth of Abū Barzah (رضي الله عنه) also supports this in that the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

عَوْرَاتِهِمْ اتَّبَعَ مَنْ قَاتَهُ ، عَوْرَاتِهِمْ تَتَّبِعُوا وَلَا الْمُسْلِمِينَ تَغْتَابُوا لَا ، قَلْبُهُ الْإِيمَانُ يَدْخُلُ لَمْ وَ بِلِسَانِهِ آمَنَ مَنْ مَعَشَرَ يَا بَيْتِهِ فِي يَقْضَحُهُ عَوْرَتَهُ اللَّهُ يَتَّبِعُ وَمَنْ ، عَوْرَتَهُ اللَّهُ يَتَّبِعُ

Oh you who have believed with your tongues but faith has not yet entered your hearts, do not back-bite Muslims. Do not seek to discover their faults, for whoever seeks after their faults, Allah will seek his faults. And if Allah seeks after someone’s faults, he will expose him for even (what he committed) in his home.

[23]

Imam al-Tirmidhī collected a ḥadīth with a similar meaning from Ibn ‘Umar (يضرر) (رضي الله عنه) [42]

And know that people or are two types in this regard:

1. People whose faults are not know to others in that they may have committed them in private but nothing of their sins is known. If they make a mistake or sin, it is not permissible to reveal or expose it or even speak about it. That would be the forbidden type of back-biting that has been condemned in the texts. Regarding this, Allah (عزَّ وَجَلَّ) said:

وَالْآخِرَةَ الدُّنْيَا فِي أَلِيمٍ عَذَابٍ لَهُمْ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ فِي الْفَاحِشَةِ تَشِيْعٌ أَنْ يُجِبُونَ الَّذِينَ إِنَّ

Indeed, those who like that immorality should be spread and publicized among those who believe, there will be for them a painful punishment in this world and in the hereafter.[25]

This spreading and publicizing of such immorality from a believer could be regarding something the person actually did or something he is wrongly accused of, being innocent of it, such as the case with the famous story of the lie against 'Āishah, the wife of the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ).

Some righteous officials used to instruct those who enjoin good upon people saying, **“Try to conceal the sinners, for publicizing their sins is a means of showing the faults of the people of Islam, and the most important thing is to conceal people’s faults.”**

Likewise, if a remorseful person comes repenting and admitting his crime, he is not to be exposed or inquired about. Rather, he is ordered to return and conceal his affair as the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) instructed Mā'iz and a Ghāmīdee woman. [26]

He (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) also did not inquire into the affair of the one who came to him saying, “I transgressed the prescribed limit, so establish the punishment upon me.” [27]

In the same way, if such a person were to be taken to account for his crime yet the news of which had not reached the leader, then intercession should be made on his part so that he would not inform the leader.

Similarly, there has come a ḥadīth in which the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

الْحُدُودَ إِلَّا عَثْرَاتِهِمُ الْهَيْبَاتِ ذَوِي أَقْبِلُوا

Pardon those of prestigious character of their faults except the prescribed punishments.[28]

2. The second type of people with respect to sins is those who are well-known for their sins, those who openly and publicly commit them. They themselves are neither concerned at all with the sins they commit, nor with what people say about them. These are the wicked ones who openly display their crimes. Such people do not have the honor of others refraining from back-biting them as has been reported from al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and others. Regarding such people, there is no problem with inquiring about their affairs in order to establish the prescribed rulings against them. Some of our companions have explicitly stated this, using as evidence the statement of the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) to Unays (هل لا يضر) (عنه):

أَفَارْجُمَهُ اعْتَرَفَتْ فَإِنْ هَذَا امْرَأَةٌ إِلَى أَنْ تَبْسُ يَا وَاعْدُ

Go in the morning, Unays, to the wife of this man (she was accused of adultery) and if she confesses, stone her.[29]

Also, regarding this type of people, intercession is not to be made on their behalf when taken to account even if the news has not reached the leader. Rather, they are left to have the prescribed penalties pronounced upon them so that their crime is known as a deterrent to others like them.

Imam Mālik said:

Whoever is not known for harming the people, yet may have made some errors or mistakes, then there is no problem with interceding and pleading on his behalf as long as his crimes have not already been conveyed to the leader. As for those who are known for their evil and corruption, I do not like that anyone should intercede or argue on their behalf. Rather they are left to have the sentences carried out upon them.

Ibn al-Mundhir and others have also reported this.

Imam Aḥmad also disliked that crimes should be raised up to the attention of the authorities in every circumstance because often they would not carry out the prescribed punishments as they should. For this he said, “If you know that the ruling will be (correctly) pronounced upon a person, then raise the matter (to the attention of the leaders).” It was mentioned that some people beat a man (as a punishment for a crime) until he died, while killing him was not permissible. If only the person would have repented from the time he committed the offense, it would have been better for him in that he repents for something between him and Allah, thereby concealing his own sin. As for his second offense, some people are of the opinion he should do the same—he should not disclose it. Still, others have said that even upon the first offense, a person should come to the leader and confess against himself in what requires a prescribed punishment so that he may be purified (of his crime).

Footnotes:

[22] Authentic: Recorded by Ibn Mājah (no. 2546) and al-Albānī said it is authentic in “Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan Ibn Mājah” (no. 2063).

[23] Authentic: Recorded by Abū Dāwūd (no. 4880) and Imam Aḥmad. al-Albānī said it is authentic (Hasan Ṣaḥīḥ) in “Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan Abī Dāwūd” (no. 4083).

[24] The ḥadīth collected by al-Tirmidhī (no. 2032) that Ibn Rajab is referring to is:

مَنْ فَإِنَّهُمْ، عَوْرَاتٍ تَتَّبِعُوا وَلَا تُعَبِّرُوهُمْ وَلَا الْمُسْلِمِينَ تُؤْذُوا لَا قَلْبِهِ، إِلَى الْإِيمَانِ يُغْضِي وَلَمْ بِلِسَانِهِ أَسْلَمَ مَنْ مَعَشَرَ يَا رَحْلِهِ جَوْفٍ فِي وَلَوْ يَفْضَحُهُ عَوْرَتَهُ اللَّهُ تَتَّبِعَ وَمَنْ عَوْرَتَهُ، اللَّهُ تَتَّبِعَ الْمُسْلِمِ أَخِيهِ عَوْرَةَ تَتَّبِعَ

Oh you who have accepted Islam with their tongue yet faith has not reached your hearts, do not harm Muslims. Do not humiliate them, and do not seek to discover their faults. Whoever seeks after the faults of his Muslim brother, Allah will certainly seek his faults. And if Allah seeks his faults, he will expose him even if he were in the innermost privacy of his own home.

al-Albānī said this narration is authentic in “Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan al-Tirmidhī” (no. 1655).

[25] Sūrah al-Nūr, 24:19.

[26] Authentic: This is a reference to the story in which the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ) repeatedly refused to carry out the prescribed punishment upon a companion and kept asking for excuses for him. The ḥadīth is recorded by Muslim (no. 1695) from Sulaymān Ibn Buraydah who narrated from his father who said: Mā'iz Ibn Maalik (رضي الله عنه) came to the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) and said, “Oh messenger of Allah, purify me (by establishing the prescribed punishment upon me).” He (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) replied:

إِلَيْهِ وَتُبَّ اللَّهُ فَاسْتَغْفِرُ ارْجِعْ وَيَحْكَ

Woe to you. Seek forgiveness from Allah and repent to him.

He then returned and later came back and said the same thing to which the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) kept saying:

إِلَيْهِ وَتُبَّ اللَّهُ فَاسْتَغْفِرُ ارْجِعْ وَيَحْكَ

Woe to you. Seek forgiveness from Allah and repent to him.

On the fourth time, he (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) asked him:

أُطَهِّرُكَ فِيْمَ

For what should I purify you?

Mā'iz said, “For committing adultery.” So Allah’s messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) asked (others about the man):

جُنُونٌ أَبِيهِ

Is there madness in him?

After being informed that the man is not crazy. He (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) further asked:

خَمْرًا أَشْرَبَ

Did he drink alcohol?

A man stood up to him but did not find the smell of alcohol from him. Allah's messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) asked him:

أَزْتَبَتَ

Did you (really) commit adultery?

He replied, "Yes." He (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) then instructed that he be stoned. So, the people differed amongst themselves about him into two groups: one saying, "He is ruined! His deeds are lost." and another group saying, "What repentance could be better than the repentance of Mā'iz? He came (willingly) to the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), put his hand in his hand, and said, 'Kill me by the stone.'" So they remained in that state for two or three days. Then the messenger of Allah (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) came while they were sitting, greeted them and sat. He said:

مَالِكِ بْنِ لِمَاعِزٍ اسْتَغْفِرُوا

Ask for forgiveness for Mā'iz Ibn Mālik.

So they said, "May Allah forgive Mā'iz Ibn Mālik." Allah's messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) then said:

لَوْ سَعَتْهُمْ أُمَّةٌ بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ لَوُتَّوَبَةٌ تَابَ لَقَدْ

He repented with such repentance that if it were divided among the entire nation, it would encompass them all.

The prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) did similarly with the pregnant woman who also came to confess committing adultery with Mā'iz.

[27] Authentic: This story was narrated in the ḥadīth collected by al-Bukhārī (no. 6823), Muslim (no. 2764), and Abū Dāwūd (no. 4381). Anas Ibn Mālik (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) : dias (عنه)

I was with Allah's messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) when a man came to him and said, "Oh messenger of Allah, I have transgressed the limit, so establish the punishment upon me." Yet he (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) did not ask about him (his crime). The prayer time came and he prayed with the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ). When the he (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) finished the prayer, the man stood and again said, "Oh messenger of Allah, indeed I transgressed the limit so establish the book of Allah upon me." He (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) replied:

مَعَنَا صَلَّيْتَ فَذْ أَلَيْسَ

Did you not pray with us?

He answered, “Yes.” He (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) then told him:

حَدَّثَكَ قَالَ أَوْ ذَنْبِكَ لَكَ غَفَرَ قَدْ اللَّهُ فَإِنَّ

Then indeed Allah has forgiven your sin (or he said:) your (transgression of the) prescribed law.

[28] Authentic: Recorded by Abū Dāwūd (no. 4375) and al-Albānī declared it to be authentic in “Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan Abī Dāwūd” (no. 3679).

[29] Authentic: Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 2315), Muslim (no. 1698), al-Tirmidhī (no. 1433), and Ibn Mājah (no. 2549).