

Summary of 4.11 "Accountability, Paradise & Hellfire"

We talked about a number of issues in the last series. One was accountability and we mentioned that all human beings will stand before God and will be given their book of deeds. Those who receive it in their right hand are safe and a sign that their good deeds exceed their bad deeds and those who receive their book in their left hand or behind their back it is a sign that their evil deeds are more. There is a kind of scale that will weigh those deeds. We tried to emphasize that this doesn't mean that accountability is that mechanical. We mentioned the various quotations from the Quran indicating that accountability is done with full justice, fairness and generosity. We said that for one evil deed only one is recorded against in the record and for one good deed it is sometimes multiplied by 10, 70 and sometimes 700 depending on ones intentions. So one gets a lot more reward than punishment and we indicated that there is a great deal of room for grace. We don't really enter paradise just because of our deeds. Grace is there for those who seek it.

We mentioned after this that people will pass through *Asserat* which is a kind of narrow path. Some people would fall into hell fire and those with good deeds will be unable to make through without much difficulty.

Then we went on to give a brief description of the two final abodes hell fire and paradise. From what is mentioned about it in the Quran we indicated that it is not the kind of place that is very grim and painful. Worst of all people who go there do not die or live they just continue in this constant state of punishment for rejection of God and ignoring His message sent through his prophets. Then we talked about paradise that everyone should strive to get into. We indicated that the Quran gives descriptions that we as human beings can comprehend and understand. It talks about food, nice clothes, adornment and all kinds of enjoyment and pure spouses.

We indicated that this description vivid and material as it may appear is used to help us appreciate the kind of joy that will be in paradise. We indicated that according to the Quran and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) no body can really understand or perceive the extent of joy that one will get in paradise. Just to give us a hint the Quran talks about other rewards that are not material like being in the company of the pure with the angels, the martyrs and pious people. In chapter nine of the Quran it talks about the pleasure of God and above all the climax in paradise according to chapter 75 is the removal of all the human perceptual barriers to the point where we would be able to see God.

4.12 Intercession

Host: Is there some chance that some people may be taken out of hell after some time?

Jamal Badawi: Some but not all people may be taken out of hell. There is reference in the Quran to those who rejected God and who were really wicked and how they would stay there forever. As one verse says they do not die or live there. Other verses in the Quran use the term gives a sense of eternity *khalidena fiha* which means that they will be there forever. However it is quite possible that some people would die with lots of evil deeds and sins but still with some remains of faith or goodness in their hearts. There is a reference to that in one of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) where he says that on The Day of Judgment after these people are purified by going to hell to pay for their sins that Allah will ordain the angels to take out of hell-fire anyone that believed that there is no deity but Me even if he has an atoms weight of faith or goodness in his heart. This means that no matter how sinful the person may be that faith and belief in the ones of God would lead to take them out of the hell fire.

Some people use this in an erroneous sense as someone might say well if I am only going to hell for a couple of days let me enjoy my life here

why should I sacrifice. ♦♦ What they forget first of all is that no body knows how many days or years this state of punishment will continue for and we know that under severe punishment every second becomes a year. ♦ Thirdly in (22:47) it says that ♦ Verily a Day in the sight of thy Lord is like a thousand years of your reckoning. ♦♦ This is even a more horrifying figure. ♦ In one verse in the Quran it says a day is equivalent to a hundred thousand years, so if one is trying to say let me enjoy my life here its only a couple of days in hell just be careful as to what that day might look like. ♦ There is reference in chapter 32 and 70 to this relative counting of days. ♦ But on the whole according to the Prophet (PBUH) God will still overshadow with His mercy those people who had a trace of faith and goodness.

Host: ♦ Do Muslims believe in intercession or someone being able to intercede with God on their behalf or for others?

Jamal Badawi:

There is a concept in Islam of intercession but not intermediary. ♦ The equivalent Arabic term is *shafa'a*. ♦ The reason I am saying it is not intermediary because this means someone standing between two other people. ♦ This is totally alien to Islamic thinking because a Muslim believes that there is no intermediary between man and God. ♦ Even messengers and great prophets like Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (PBUT) are not regarded as intermediaries between man and God. ♦ The relationship between the human and his creator is direct. ♦ Those great prophets came to guide us and establish our personal relationship with God.

♦

Intercession in a sense of pleading with God on behalf of someone who might be sinful is different as the person who intercedes has no authority unlike intermediary who has authority. ♦ In this limited sense this is admissible. ♦ This again should be put in the proper perspective as it can't contradict one important principle that has been emphasized in the Quran in numerous places that every soul will be held responsible for himself. ♦ One can't throw the blame on others as we are given the faculties and guidance through prophets and everyone has to stand on his own merits.

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Even if that merit is imperfect with our human deficiencies and shortcomings we find that the Quran the door is wide open for repentance and correcting the situation directly between God and the person without any intermediary without any confession. ♦ The Quran makes it clear that everything can be forgiven except for one thing and that is to associate others with God. ♦ Actually one place in the Quran says ♦ God will not forgive anyone who associates others with Him and He forgives anything that is less than that ♦ for whomever He wishes. ♦ Another qualification for this intercession is that this can only be granted after God gives permission. ♦ For example in chapter 2 in the Quran it says that no body can intercede with God on behalf of anyone else except with His permission.

♦

Finally this intercession can't of anyone but rather must be on behalf of some that is accepted by God. ♦ He could be sinful but he is still accepted by God and that there was some trace of faith and goodness in his heart. ♦ We find an example of this in (21:28) that those who intercede can only do it on behalf of people who are accepted by God. ♦ Of course the clearest intercessor will be Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). ♦ He said in one of his sayings that he would be an intercessor but again not on behalf of everybody but on behalf of those who deserve it.

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Host: ♦ Can a person know whether or not he or she is going to paradise while they are living their lives here on earth?

Jamal Badawi:

I will just refer directly to one important saying of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). ♦ One time he was telling his companions that ♦ none of you will enter paradise because of your good deeds. ♦♦ So they looked at him and said ♦ even you oh messenger of Allah? ♦♦ He said ♦ even me unless God shrouds me with His mercy. ♦♦ Here we have a man who is not only a prophet but is the final

prophet and one of the most loved prophet of God teaching people spiritual humility by telling them that even I am not guaranteed paradise as I have to depend on the grace or mercy of God. This is a strong lesson to learn.

A person while he is still living has to struggle against himself and against evil in society. If one knows for sure that he has the ticket this could lead to spiritual arrogance. This could also weaken the tendency to sacrifice and to do good deeds because one has already made it. This could lead to a great deal of danger and of course knowing human nature and the need to stay careful and on guard makes this a dangerous kind of thinking.

In fact this doesn't mean that a person should always have anxiety that no matter how much they believe or how many good deeds they have that they don't know where they are going. Again the Quran makes it clear that the promise of God is true. God is not misleading us to discipline ourselves and conduct a good life as he ordained just to encourage us to do good. We know for sure that his promise will be true. God gave the criteria in the Quran which includes belief, good deeds and praying for the grace and mercy of God. One may feel in their heart that so long as he or she is following the right path there is a kind of inner peace and tranquility. Also, there is one realistic question that comes up- suppose a person in this particular day is a good, believing and pious person but can anyone know for sure if a person will change towards the end of his life and dies an unbeliever. How can anyone tell that someone who is now wicked and evil might not repent towards the end of his life and be accepted and go to paradise? It is very dangerous to simply start classifying and saying because of paying lip service or because of saying that they believe that they are safe. The Quran says that belief itself has to be confirmed and translated into action. The idea is not to be anxious but to always be on guard.

Host: What is the Muslim attitude towards the idea that some people will be going to paradise because of their particular beliefs while others who don't share those particular beliefs will be going to the hell fire?

Jamal Badawi: I remember being asked myself a very similar question. I was asked you're a Muslim do you believe that because you are a Muslim that you are going to paradise and those who are not Muslim are going to hell fire? My first response to him was who told you that by a person claiming to be a Muslim or by believing in God, His messenger and His books that he has a cart-blanch to paradise? Then I quoted the Hadith that I quoted above that the Prophet was teaching us humility and that I am not going to paradise just because of my deeds. Anyone who says they are sure they are going to paradise is spiritually arrogant. One can say that they are doing their best to follow the path that God promised would lead to heaven but that they don't know for sure and they will keep trying.

Secondly, what about those who died in the past without hearing about those prophets? Are they to be condemned or is it a judgment that is best to be left to God?

Thirdly, when trying to classify who goes to paradise and hell aren't we then taking for ourselves a power that belongs to God. Aren't we then really associating others with God by claiming this divine attribute of final judgment to ourselves? Who am I as a human being who can't guarantee myself to say that this person goes here and that there. I can give the criteria and path that must be followed to reach a certain point but I can't say where each person is going because I don't know what is in people's hearts. In fact we find evidence in the Quran that only God will decide between the Jews, Christians, those who associated others with God and the Muslims. We are not supposed to judge people but we are supposed to proclaim the truth as we understand it and as we are convinced of it in our hearts. We are not in the position to judge anyone as we are to be judged ourselves by

God.

Host: Are animals resurrected and are they accountable in the same way as mankind?

Jamal Badawi:

There is one place in the Quran that says initially on The Day of Judgment animals will come to life. In one verse for example it says when the beasts are collected while describing the scene on The Day of Judgment. In principle animals are not held accountable in a sense of going to paradise or hell fire for their deeds because they are not responsible beings. Angels for example are created good and they have no choice but being good. Animals are created without intellect, the spirituality that human beings have, and power of reason. So they are not held responsible because God created them as such. Only humans and Jinn, unseen creators who have a choice between good and evil and who have free will, would be held responsible for their actions.

The other thing that one can say by inference is that the description of paradise as indicated in the Quran and in the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is that a person would get everything that he or she wants; so if pets make them happy they would not be deprived of it in paradise.

Host: What is the relevance of the belief in the hereafter in our day to day existence? Is it a question of belief or dogma?

Jamal Badawi:

It is not necessarily a dogma. If one recalls in previous series that even monotheism, belief in prophethood, belief in angels in revelation sounds as if it is something dogmatic or a matter of belief in the unseen but we have shown in the previous how these relate to the day to day life of the individual. First of all belief in The Day of Judgment is related to the understanding and belief in ultimate justice. We find people who are evil and wicked they torture or kill people in large numbers but they may still die rich and powerful without getting their just punishment. They may get some punishment in this life but many times they don't get enough. The opposite is also as we have people who are good, pious, God fearing, they discipline themselves, and offer all kinds of sacrifice in the service of humanity but they may be under oppression from unjust rulers and they suffer all kinds in pain and die in pain without getting compensation. Is that just? In those terms there must be some stage in terms of our logic, our understanding, in the laws of nature that things have to conclude. For example the Quran in (45:21) says **What!** Do those who seek after evil ways think that We shall hold them equal with those who believe and do righteous deeds, - that equal will be their life and their death? Ill is the judgment that they make. In chapter 38 it says we can't equate those who are corrupt with those who are good. It is up to God to fulfill ultimate judgment and ultimate justice.

The second and most important part is that the belief in the life hereafter and ultimate justice gives the individual's life perspective as a person realizes that this life is not aimless. Ones we believe in this we try to cement our personal relationship with God by being more spiritually oriented. This reminds me of the saying of Rabia a AlAdawiah when she said Oh my Lord I am not worshipping you just because I am afraid of your hell fire, nor am I doing it because I aspire for your paradise I do it only out of love of Thee and the hope of being close to you in The Day of Judgment.