10243 - Commentary on “Wherever you turn, there is the Face of Allah”

the question

Could you explain the following verse? If Allah is above the heavens, why is Allah’ face there wherever you face?
I am only asking this because I was explaining that Allah was above the heavens to somebody, and he quoted this ayah; I could not respond to him after that: (Al-Baqarah 2:115)

(And to Allah belong the east and the west, so wherever you turn yourselves or your faces there is the Face of Allah (and He is High above, over His Throne). Surely! Allâh is All-Sufficient for His creatures' needs, All-Knowing.)

Summary of answer

The correct view is that what is meant by wajh is the Face of Allah. So wherever you turn there is the Face of Allah, because Allah encompasses all things. For more, please see the detailed answer.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Allah is above His throne

We are obliged to believe that Allah has risen above His throne in a manner that befits His majesty, not in a manner that resembles human movement, and to believe that Allah has a Face that is not like the faces of His creation.

So we should not go astray when interpreting verses and we must not distort their meanings; we should follow the views of the righteous salaf concerning that.

Commentary on “So wherever you turn (yourselves or your faces), there is the Face of Allah”

With regard to the tafsir (commentary) on this verse, Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymin said:

“If you ask whether every mention of the wajh (face) with reference to Allah means the Face of Allah which is one of His attributes, the answer is that this is the basic principle. Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And turn not away those who invoke their Lord, morning and afternoon seeking His Face” [al-An’am 6:52]

“And who has (in mind) no favour from anyone to be paid back, Except to seek the Wajh of his Lord, the Most High. He surely, will be pleased (when he will enter Paradise)” [al-Layl 92:19-21]

And there are other similar verses.

The basic principle is that what is meant by wajh is the Face of Allah which is one of His attributes. But there is a verse concerning which the mufassirin differed, which is this verse (interpretation of the meaning):

“And to Allah belong the east and the west, so wherever you turn (yourselves or your faces) there is the Face of Allah.” [al-Baqarah 2:115]

Some of them said that what is meant by wajh here is direction, because Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“For every nation there is a direction to which they face (in their prayers).” [al-Baqarah 2:148]

So what is meant by wajh here is direction, so “there is the wajh of Allah” means there is the direction of prayer which Allah accepts.

They said: because when travelling, if a person offers nafl prayers he can pray in whatever direction he is facing.

But the correct view is that what is meant by wajh here is the Face of Allah. So wherever you turn there is the Face of Allah, because Allah encompasses all things, and because it was proven from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that when the worshipper stands to pray, Allah is in front of (before) him. Hence it is forbidden for the worshipper to spit in front of him, because Allah is in front of him. So if you pray in a place where you do not know where the qiblah is, but you do your best to figure it out and pray, and the qiblah is in fact behind you, then Allah is in front of you even in this situation.

This is the correct meaning which is in accordance with the apparent meaning of the verse, and the first meaning does not in fact contradict it.

So the two meanings do not contradict one another.

It should be noted that this mighty Face which is described in terms of majesty and honour cannot be fully encompassed by human descriptions and imagination. Rather everything that you can think of, Allah is above that and is greater.

“but they will never encompass anything of His Knowledge” [Ta-Ha 20:110 – interpretation of the meaning]

Commentary on “Everything will perish save His Face”

With regard to the verse (interpretation of the meaning): “Everything will perish save His Face” [al-Qasas 28:88]

What this means is that everything will perish except His Essence of which His Face is one of the attributes. (Sharh al-‘Aqidah al-Wasitiyyah by Ibn ‘Uthaymin, 1/243-245)

We should not compare the Creator to His creation and imagine Him in terms of His creation, for Allah is as He has said of Himself (interpretation of the meaning):

“There is nothing like Him.” [al-Shura 42:11]

So Allah has risen above His Throne, and He faces the worshipper when he prays, and there is no contradiction between them with regard to Allah.

Some people were similarly confused about the issue of Allah descending during the last third of the night to the lowest heaven. They said that the night is not the same throughout the earth, so how can Allah descend during the night and day at the same time?

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymin said:

“Later generations who knew that the earth is round and that the sun revolves around the earth said: how can He descend during the last third of the night, when the last third of the night moves from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and goes to Europe and areas nearby? We say: now you are comparing the attributes of Allah to the attributes of created beings. If you believe it you do not have to do anything beyond that, so do not ask how.

Rather say: When it is the last third of the night in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, then Allah descends, and when it is the last third of the night in America, Allah descends then as well.

So our attitude is that we believe what has reached us via Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), and that Allah descends to the lowest heaven when there is one third of the night left, and says, “Who will call upon Me, that I may answer him? Who will ask of Me, that I may give him? Who will ask My forgiveness so that I may forgive him?” (Sharh al-Wasitiyyah, 2/437)

And Allah knows best.