

117725 - Reflections on the phrase “Islam is a religion of moderation”

the question

Righteous people talk about “moderation in religion,” and secularists talk about “moderation in religion”; even the disbelievers talk about “moderation in religion.” What is “moderation in religion”?

Detailed answer

Nowadays the phrase “Islam is a religion of moderation” has become popular, and it is true; there is evidence for that in the Quran and Sunnah, and in the words of the scholars. But at the same time, we find that there are people who quote this phrase with ulterior motives, and use it as an excuse to water down Islamic rulings on the basis of this phrase. They examine the fundamentals of Islamic teaching in order to try to shake their foundations on the basis of this phrase and their misunderstanding of it.

So now this phrase is used in two ways, one of which is true and the other is false.

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As for the true and rightful use of this phrase, it is supported by evidence from the Quran and Sunnah, and the views of Sunni scholars. In the Quran it says that this ummah is “an Ummah [nation, community] justly balanced”; what is meant is that it is the best and most just of nations, and they are the ones who are between the two extremes.

Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

{Thus We have made of you an Ummah [nation, community] justly balanced, that you might be witnesses over humankind, and the Messenger might be a witness over you; We prescribed the qiblah towards which you used to face only in order to know those who would follow the Messenger from those who would turn on their heels. It was indeed difficult, except for those

whom Allah guided. Allah will never let your faith go to waste, for Allah is to all people Most Compassionate, Most Merciful} [al-Baqarah 2:143].

Imam at-Tabari (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

I think that Allah, may He be exalted, only described them as justly balanced because they have a moderate approach to religion, so they are not people of extremes like the Christians, who went to extremes in monasticism and in what they say about 'Isa, and they do not fall short like the Jews, who tampered with the Book of Allah, killed their prophets, told lies about their Lord and disbelieved in Him. Rather they are people of moderation and justice in matters of religion, so Allah described them in these terms, because the dearest of things to Allah are those that are justly balanced and moderate. (End quote from *Tafsir at-Tabari*, 3/142).

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said, reiterating this idea: There are some who go to extremes in the religion of Allah and others who are heedless about it, but the best of the people are those in the middle, who are far above the shortcomings of the negligent and do not go as far as those who overstepped the bounds. Allah, may He be glorified, has made this ummah one that is justly balanced, which is the best and most fair, because it takes a position between two blameworthy parties. Justice is the middle position between extremism and negligence. Trouble only befalls that which is at the extremes, and the middle is protected by those extremities, so the best of things are those that are moderate and in the middle. (*Ighathat al-Lahfan*, 1/182)

What confirms this meaning is the following examples from the religious texts:

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The supplication of the Muslims in Surat al-Fatihah:

{Guide us to the straight path –

The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favor, not of those who have earned [Your] anger or of those who are astray} [al-Fatihah 1:6-7].

The Muslim repeats this supplication constantly, in prayer and otherwise; in it, he is asking Allah, may He be exalted, to guide him to the path of those upon whom Allah has bestowed favour, namely the prophets and the strong and true in faith (*siddiqin*), and to protect him from the path of those who earned His anger, namely the Jews who went astray despite their knowledge, and the path of the Christians who were misguided because of their ignorance.

-2-

The zakah collector should not take the best or the worst of a person's wealth:

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) gave instructions to Mu`adh ibn Jabal (may Allah be pleased with him), when he sent him to Yemen, saying: "...then teach them that Allah has enjoined on them charity (zakah) to be taken from their rich and given to their poor. If they accept that, then beware (of taking) the best of their wealth." (Narrated by al-Bukhari, 1425, and Muslim, 130)

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said, listing what we learn from this hadith: It indicates that it is prohibited for the zakah collector to take the best of their wealth when collecting zakah; rather he should take that which is of average quality. And it is prohibited for the owner of the wealth to give the worst of his wealth. (End quote from *Sharh Sahih Muslim*, 1/197).

-3-

Moderation in spending:

Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

{And who, when they spend, are neither extravagant nor stingy, but follow a middle path between the [two]}

[al-Furqan 25:67].

Ibn Kathir (may Allah have mercy on him) said: That is, they are not wasteful in their spending, spending more than is necessary, and they are not miserly towards their families, falling short

in giving them their dues and not giving them enough. Rather they are moderate and do what is best, for the best of matters are those which are moderate and do not go to either extreme.

{but follow a middle path between the [two]} – this is like the verse {Do not keep your hand tied to your neck [like a miser], or stretch it forth to its utmost extent [like a squanderer], lest you become blameworthy and destitute} [al-Isra' 17:29]. (End quote from *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, 6/123-124).

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With regard to misuse of the phrase “Islam is a religion of moderation,” this is what some writers and callers to Islam promote of taking a stand in the middle of two opposite things: and not taking the correct stand as described and enjoined in the religious texts. So, for example, they will stand between Sunnah and innovation (bid`ah), so they do not reject innovation completely or accept Sunnah completely. With regard to the ruling on apostasy, they try to adopt a middle stance, so they do not accept the ruling of asking the apostate to repent [and if he refuses, he is to be executed], and they do not allow apostasy without limits. And they do not reject Sufism completely. Rather they make themselves think that they are being just when they do not deem this group [the Sufis] to be one of the misguided and doomed groups. The same applies to other misguided groups; they even went as far as to adopting a middle stance between Islam and disbelief. Hence you will find such people supporting the idea of holding dialogues that are held to bring believers in tawhid and believers in shirk together, as when efforts are made to bring Sunnis and Shi`ah – or Muslims and disbelievers – together, and as is the case when efforts are made to bring Islam, Christianity and Judaism closer together. By doing so, they are not supporting Islam and the Sunnah, or refuting innovation and disbelief; rather they are devoting their efforts to watering down their religion and compromising on its fundamentals so that their image may be embellished in the media, when they are described as promoters of moderation. Thus they acquire some worldly gains, but that will not benefit them when they meet their Lord; rather that will harm them. Allah caused one of their most prominent figures to be disappointed when he was barred from entering some non-Muslim countries, even though he was one of the most prominent figures who described them as his

brethren and even described the Christians of his country as martyrs, and he put a great deal of effort into watering down his religion with fatwas which he claimed were making things easy or were in line with his middle path. All of that did not benefit him in this world. Allah the Almighty indeed spoke the truth: {And never will the Jews or the Christians approve of you until you follow their religion} [al-Baqarah 2:120].

These people and others should understand that moderation and taking the middle path does not mean that the Muslim stands in the middle between two opposite stances; rather it means ensuring that one's stance is in line with Islamic teachings and judging matters appropriately on the basis of the texts of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Moderation means adopting a middle stance between two things that are both wrong and misguided in the first place. As for the one who uses the concept of moderation in an inappropriate way, he is choosing a middle stance regardless, even if one of the two stances in question is Tawhid and the Sunnah; this is wrong.

Abu'l-Muzaffar as-Sam`ani (may Allah have mercy on him) said: It is recommended to choose a view that stands between two other views. Choosing a path between a view that is extreme and a view that falls short is only more appropriate if it is acceptable; if it is not acceptable, then that should not be done. (End quote from *Qawati` al-Adillah fi Usul al-Fiqh*, 5/256).

Shaykh Muhammad ibn Salih al-'Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked: What is meant by moderation in religion, or adopting the middle way?

He replied: Moderation in religion, or adopting the middle way, means choosing a way between going to extremes and falling short. That includes academic matters and matters of creed, as well as practical matters having to do with acts of worship.

For example, in matters of creed, with regard to the names and attributes of Allah, people may be divided into three categories, two that are opposites of one another and one in the middle. One group goes to extremes in the belief that Allah is far beyond anything we know, so they deny names and attributes that Allah has attributed to Himself. Another group goes to extremes in affirming the divine names and attributes, so they affirm the names and attributes that Allah has affirmed for Himself, but they do that by way of believing that they resemble the names and

attributes of human beings. The middle group affirms the names and attributes that Allah, may He be exalted, has affirmed for Himself, without believing that there is any resemblance to the names and attributes of human beings; rather they believe that they are different and that there is nothing like unto Allah, may He be exalted, among His creation.

This has to do with creed. Similarly, with regard to physical acts of worship, some people go to extremes and do more than is required, and they are very hard on themselves. Others are negligent and heedless, so they neglect a great deal of worship. And the best of matters are those that are moderate.

The guideline regarding moderation is that whatever is prescribed in Islamic teachings is to be taken as what is moderate. Whatever is contrary to Islamic teachings cannot be described as moderation; rather it is inclining either towards extremism or towards negligence.

Shaykh al-Islam (may Allah have mercy on him) mentioned five principles in *al-'Aqidah al-Wasitiyyah*, through which he explained that with regard to these principles, Ahl as-Sunnah are in the middle amongst groups that follow innovation, so I recommend the questioner to read this book, because it is very useful. (End quote from *Fatawa Nur 'ala ad-Darb*, tape 226, side B)

He may also read *Risalat al-Wasatiyyah* by Shaykh Dr. Nasir al-'Umar (may Allah preserve him).

And Allah knows best.