

174843 - Commentary on the verse “and man was created weak” [an-Nisa’ 4:28]

the question

What is the meaning of the verse (interpretation of the meaning): “and man was created weak” [an-Nisa’ 4:28]?

Detailed answer

This verse is one of the greatest proofs that Islamic sharee‘ah (system of law and regulations) is the system that is most suited to the psychological, intellectual and physical makeup of man, and that one of its main qualities is that it is in harmony with “human nature” that is inherently weak and vulnerable, no matter how great a person may feel and how arrogant he may act, for in reality and ultimately human nature is weak and unable to survive and function except within an environment and framework that is suitable for it.

Because of that, Islamic sharia is valid for every time and place. The words “and man was created weak” [an-Nisa’ 4:28] highlight and clarify Allah’s wisdom in prescribing some of the rulings, as the reason for these easy and merciful rulings is that they are compatible with the inherently weak and dependent nature of man. This is something that is very clear to one who reads the context of this verse in the passage in which Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Allah wishes to make clear (what is lawful and what is unlawful) to you, and to show you the ways of those before you, and accept your repentance, and Allah is All-Knower, All-Wise..

Allah wishes to accept your repentance, but those who follow their lusts, wish that you (believers) should deviate tremendously away from the Right Path.

Allah wishes to lighten (the burden) for you; and man was created weak (cannot be patient to leave sexual intercourse with woman)”

[an-Nisa' 4:26-28].

Al-'Allaamah at-Taahir ibn 'Ashoor (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The words “and man was created weak” highlight and explain the reason why the rulings were made easy, show the advantage of this religion and system of law, and indicate that it is the religion which is most suited to people in every time and place. Hence the rules and regulations in previously-revealed religious texts paid attention to one situation, to the exclusion of others, and this is referred to in the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Now Allah has lightened your (task), for He knows that there is weakness in you”

[al-Anfaal 8:66].

Some commentators explained weakness here as referring to weakness with regard to the temptation of women. Tawoos said: Man is never weaker than he is in the face of the temptation of women. But the meaning of the verse is not limited to this context, although it is definitely to be noted here, because the rulings mentioned in the preceding verses speak of concessions in the issue of marriage.

End quote from at-Tahreer wa't-Tanweer (5/22)

This view, which was favoured by al-'Allaamah at-Taahir ibn 'Ashoor (may Allah have mercy on him) concerning the interpretation of weakness in this verse as referring to all kinds of human weakness, is the strongest view and most appropriate interpretation. However Ibn al-Jawzi (may Allah have mercy on him) mentioned three views concerning the verse, as he said:

With regard to what is meant by human weakness, there are three views:

1. That it refers (in general terms) to man's inherent weakness. Al-Hasan said: It (refers to the fact that) he was created from semen of worthless water (32:8).
2. That he is weak and lacks patience in the face of the temptation of women. This was the view of Tawoos and Muqaatil.

3. That he is weak in resolve when overwhelmed by emotions and desires. This is the view of az-Zajjaaj and Ibn Keesaan.

End quote from Zaad al-Maseer (1/395)

But the important principle with regard to interpretation of the holy Qur'an is that whenever it is possible to interpret the meanings of the Qur'an in broad and general terms, that is closer to what is correct, and that if there are different views that are not contradictory and it is possible to interpret a verse according to all of the views, then that is more appropriate. Please see the book Qawaa'id at-Tarjeeh 'inda al-Mufasssireen (p. 41-44).

Ibn 'Atiyyah al-Andalusi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The apparent meaning of this verse is that it is a kind of concession granted by Allah, may He be exalted, allowing men to marry slave women, and His statement about man's weakness has to do with the context of the temptation of women. In other words: as We are aware of your weakness in the face of the temptation of women, We have granted you a concession by allowing you to marry slave women. This is the view of Mujaahid and Ibn Zayd Tawoos.

After stating this point, the verse goes further in reminding people of Allah's favours, because it highlights all the concessions that He has granted to His slaves and how He has made the religion easy. Then comes a statement referring to man's weakness in general terms, because man is inherently weak and driven by whims and desires in most cases.

End quote from al-Muharrar al-Wajeez (2/40-41)

Ibn Jaziy al-Gharnaati (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“and man was created weak” – it was said that what this means is that he cannot be patient in the face of the temptation of women, and this is what is implied by the context, although the wording is more general than that.

End quote from at-Tas-heel (1/188)

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said, after quoting the views of some of the salaf concerning the meaning of the verse:

The correct view is that his weakness includes all of that, and his weakness is greater and more far-reaching than that, for he is weak in physical structure, weak in will, weak in resolve, weak in knowledge, and weak in terms of patience. The problems and troubles that result from this weakness rush to him more quickly than a stream running downhill.

End quote from Tareeq al-Hijratayn (1/228)

Al-'Allaamah as-Sa'di (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“Allah wishes to lighten (the burden) for you” [an-Nisa’ 4:28] – that is because of His perfect mercy and all-encompassing kindness, and because of His wisdom and knowledge of man’s weakness in all aspects, weakness in physical structure, weakness of will, weakness of resolve, weakness of faith, and weakness and lack of patience. So it is appropriate that Allah should lighten the burden for man with regard to that which he is too weak to deal with and that is beyond his faith, patience and strength.

End quote from Tayseer al-Kareem ar-Rahmaan (p. 175)

Therefore the most appropriate interpretation of human weakness in this verse is to understand it in general terms, so that it will include all aspects of weakness: psychological, physical, intellectual, emotional and structural. Man is weak in nature because he is influenced by the good and bad inclinations that are created in him, as well as the waswaas (whispers of the Shaytaan) and whims and desires to which he is also subject. Man is also physically weak because of what he is exposed to of problems and sickness, in comparison to many other creatures that are great in size and strong in build. He is intellectually weak because of his limited capabilities that allow him some measure of success and innovative thinking, but only within the boundary of the visible limits of the universe, and within that which may be subject to a framework of science. He is also weak in terms of emotions and feelings, so he is readily influenced by that which may make him weep, feel joy, feel cowardly, become miserly, be encouraged, or become afraid.

For further explanation on types of human weakness, you may refer to a brilliant article by Dr. ‘Abd al-Kareem Bakkaar on the following link:

<http://www.saaaid.net/Doat/bakkar/017.htm>

Because of all these kinds of weakness and helplessness, Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, has prescribed for us that which is suited to us, and He has lightened the burden for us. So He has not imposed upon us more than we can bear. Thus our sharee‘ah is a system of lightness and ease, as Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Now Allah has lightened your (task), for He knows that there is weakness in you”

[al-Anfaal 8:66].

Ibn ‘Abbaas (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

There are eight verses in Soorat an-Nisa’ which are better for this ummah than all that on which the sun rises and sets. The first of them are the verses:

“Allah wishes to make clear (what is lawful and what is unlawful) to you, and to show you the ways of those before you, and accept your repentance...”

[an-Nisa’ 4:26-28]

... three consecutive verses. The fourth is:

“If you avoid the great sins which you are forbidden to do, We shall remit from you your (small) sins, and admit you to a Noble Entrance (i.e. Paradise)”

[an-Nisa’ 4:31].

The fifth is:

“Surely! Allah wrongs not even of the weight of an atom (or a small ant), but if there is any good (done), He doubles it”

[an-Nisa’ 4:40].

The sixth is:

“And whoever does evil or wrongs himself but afterwards seeks Allahs Forgiveness, he will find Allah Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful”

[an-Nisa’ 4:110].

The seventh is:

“Verily, Allah forgives not that partners should be set up with him in worship, but He forgives except that (anything else) to whom He pleases...”

[an-Nisa’ 4:48].

And the eighth is:

“And those who believe in Allah and His Messengers and make no distinction between any of them (Messengers), We shall give them their rewards, and Allah is Ever Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful”

[an-Nisa’ 4:152].

Narrated by al-Bayhaqi in Shu‘ab al-Eemaan (9/346)

And Allah knows best.