

50388 - Why was fasting singled out when Allaah said, “Fasting is for Me and I shall reward for it?”

the question

What is special about fasting so that Allaah singled it out when He said, “Fasting is for Me and I shall reward for it?”.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Al-Bukhaari (1761) and Muslim (1946) narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Allaah said: ‘Every deed of the son of Adam is for him except fasting; it is for Me and I shall reward for it...’”

Because all deeds are for the sake of Allaah and He is the One Who rewards for them, the scholars differed concerning this phrase, “Fasting is for Me and I shall reward for it” – why is fasting singled out in this manner?

Al-Haafiz ibn Hajar (may Allaah have mercy on him) quoted the views of ten scholars who sought to explain the meaning of this hadeeth and why fasting was singled out in this manner. The most important of these views are as follows:

1 – That there is no showing off in fasting as may happen in other acts of worship. Al-Qurtubi said: Because showing off may enter into all good deeds, but no one can see when a person is fasting except Allaah, so Allaah connected it to Himself. Hence He said in the hadeeth, “He gives up his desire for My sake.” Ibn al-Jawzi said: All acts of worship can be seen when done, and they may be contaminated with some element of showing off, unlike fasting.

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2 - That what is meant by the words, "I shall reward for it" is: I am the only One Who knows the extent of his reward and how much his hasanaat (good deeds) will be multiplied. Al-Qurtubi said: What this means is that the amount of reward for good deeds may become known to people, and they will be rewarded between ten and seven hundred fold, and as much as Allaah wants, except fasting, for Allaah will reward it without measure. This is supported by a report narrated by Muslim (115) from Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) who said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Every deed of the son of Adam will be rewarded between ten and seven hundred fold. Allaah said: 'Except fasting, for it is for Me and I shall reward for it'" - i.e., I shall reward it greatly, without specifying how much. This is like the verse in which Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Only those who are patient shall receive their reward in full, without reckoning"

[al-Zumar 39:10]

3 - That what is meant by "fasting is for Me" is that it is the dearest of acts of worship to Me. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr said: The words "Fasting is for Me" are sufficient to indicate the superiority of fasting over all other acts of worship. Al-Nasaa'i (2220) narrated that Abu Umaamah said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "You should fast, for there is nothing like it." Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Nasaa'i.

4 - That fasting is mentioned in conjunction with Allaah by way of honouring, as we say, "the House of Allaah," although all houses belong to Allaah. Al-Zayn ibn al-Muneer said: giving a specific meaning to something general in a context such as this can only be understood as being by way of honouring.

Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

This hadeeth points to the virtue of fasting in numerous ways:

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1 - Allaah singled out fasting for Himself from all other good deeds, because of its honoured status before Him, because He loves it and because it is a demonstration of sincerity towards Him, as it is a secret between a person and his Lord, which no one can see except Allaah. The fasting person may be in a place with no other people around, and he could eat or drink that which Allaah has forbidden to the fasting person, but he does not do that, because he knows that he has a Lord Who can see him even though he is alone and Who has forbidden that to him. So he forsakes it for the sake of Allaah and fearing His punishment, seeking His reward. Because of that, Allaah appreciates his sincerity and singled out fasting for Himself from among all other good deeds. Hence He said: "He gives up his desires and his food for My sake."

The benefit of this singling out will be seen on the Day of Resurrection, as Sufyaan ibn 'Uyaynah said: When the Day of Resurrection comes, Allaah will bring His slave to account and will settle any scores outstanding from the rest of his deeds, until when there is nothing left but fasting, Allaah will settle the matter and will admit him to Paradise by virtue of his fasting.

2 - Allaah said concerning fasting: "I shall reward him for it." So he connected the reward for fasting to Himself, because the reward for righteous deeds is mentioned by number, and a good deed will be rewarded between ten and seven hundred fold, many times. But with regard to fasting, Allaah connected the reward to Himself without specifying any number. Allaah is the most generous of those who are generous, and the gift reflects the generosity of the giver. So the reward of the one who fasts will be very great, without reckoning. Fasting is patience in obeying Allaah, patience in keeping away from the things forbidden by Allaah, and patience in bearing the decree of Allaah, hunger, thirst, physical and mental weakness. So it combines all three types of patience, thus the fasting person deserves to be counted as one of the patient, and Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Only those who are patient shall receive their reward in full, without reckoning"

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[al-Zumar 39:10]

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And Allaah knows best.