



A Comparative Analysis of the Interpretation of the Verse "Forgiveness" by the Messenger of God (PBUH) from the Point of View of the Interpretations of the Fariqayn

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Abstract

The infallibility (‘*Ismat عصمت*) of the prophets, peace be upon them, is one of the fundamentals of belief among all Muslims; But regarding the realm of it in terms of actions and time, there are differences of opinion between different sects. Many Shia scholars have proved the infallibility of the Prophets (PBUH) in various fields based on the verses of the Qur'an and the narrations of the infallibles, but some commentators and scholars of the Sunnis despite Qur'an's statement regarding the necessity of meaning *Motashabeh* (متشابه) verses through *Mohkam* (محکم) verses, by adhering to the surface of Quran do not consider the Prophets (pbuh) including the Holy Prophet (pbuh) to be infallible and believe that they are committing sins. Therefore, they have brought the infallibility of the Messenger of God (pbuh), Muhammad, under question. One of the doubted verses is verse 43 of Surah Al-Tawbah, which some commentators of Fariqin have misinterpreted it and say that God's pardon and forgiveness is for sin, therefore the Prophet has committed a mistake. In this article, we will compare the interpretations of Fariqin in justifying this verse.

Keywords: *Motashabeh Verses; The Infallibility of the Messenger of God; Interpretations of Fariqayn (Two Sects of Shia and Sunni)*

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Although the subject of infallibility of the Prophets has a long history in the religious debates, it has been always one of the most important and disputable topics of Islamic theology among Muslim theologians and commentators. One of the verses that has been questioned by some commentators of Fariqin is the second verse of Surah Fath, which by sufficing to the surface the said verse, it has been

claimed, the phrase "عفا الله عنك Afallah An-ka" shows that God has clearly promised His forgiveness to the prophet. Forgiveness is after someone committing sins. Also, the phrase "لم أذنت لهم Lam Azanta Lahum" is used to reprimand the Messenger of God. Therefore, in this research, we intend to have a comparative study concerning the interpretations of Fariqin in explaining the verse and choose the most authentic interpretation.

Literature Review

The background of this topic consists of two parts, "general" and "specific". The general background consists of a part regarding the interpretations that have addressed this topic; also, very generally, books about *Motashabeh* verses related to the infallibility of the Prophet (PBUH) have been mentioned. In the specific part, two researches have been conducted: 1. "An analysis of divine forgiveness for the Prophet (PBUH) based on verse 43 of Surah Tawbah", by Mr. Tayeb Hosseini in "Qur'anic Research Journal No. 77". 2. "Challenges of Quranic translations concerning *Motashabeh* verses related to the infallibility of the Messenger of God (PBUH) and solutions (case study: verses 12 of Surah Hud and 43 of Surah Tawbah)", by Dr. Elaha Hadian, in "Religious Research No. 23". In this research, the verse has been investigated in a comparative way from the viewpoints of Fariqin, and the most appropriate point of view has been chosen from among them.

1. Forgiveness for and Punishment of the Prophet (PBUH)

During the battle of Tabuk, a group came to the Prophet (PBUH) and, giving various excuses, asked for permission to excuse them from taking part in the battle. His Holiness also allowed them. God says in this verse:

عَفَا اللَّهُ عَنْكَ لِمَ أَذْنَتْ لَهُمْ حَتَّىٰ يَتَّبِعَنَّ لَكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَ تَعْلَمُ الْكَاذِبِينَ

May Allah excuse you! Why did you grant them leave [to stay behind] before those who told the truth were evident to you and you had ascertained the liars? (9:43)

2. The Doubt

There is a doubtful point in this verse: the sentence عفا الله عنك shows that God has clearly promised the Prophet (PBUH) to forgive him. God's forgiveness is for sins; therefore, the Prophet (PBUH) had made a mistake. Also, the sentence < لِمَ أَذْنَتْ لَهُمْ > is for reprimanding His Holiness, who becomes the source of the idea of infallibility.

3. Examining the Meaning of the Word "Forgiveness عفو" Literal-Wise and as a Quranic Term

In order to remove the similar Tashaboh aspect of the verse, it is appropriate to do a precise lexicology of the verse at the beginning in order to know whether the word used in the verse that caused the similarity means as a Quranic term or not.

4. The Literal and Termic Meaning of "Forgiveness عفو"

"عفو" means forgiving and neglecting sins (Qurashi, vol.5, p.19). Ragheb says: "عفو means to intend to get something; Therefore, it is said, "عفا و اعتقاه"; He intended to take everything that is in front of him."

Also, he considered forgiveness of sins in the meaning of removing sins. From his point of view, the عفا الله عنك is "the intention of Allah to remove the guilt of you" (Raghib Isfahani, vol.1, p.574).

Qurashi says: "The simple meaning of forgiveness is to forgive and ignore; Like " **والكاظمين الغيظ و العافين عن الناس** (Ale-Imran 134) and since it is constantly transfixed with **عن** in the Qur'an, no doubt it should be interpreted as ignoring." (Qurashi: *Qamus Quran*, v.5, p.19)

Farahidi also believes **عفو** to mean relenting a person who deserves punishment (Farahidi, al-‘Ayn, v.2,p.258).

عفو as a term means refraining from impeachment and punishment of the criminal. Imam **Sadiq** (a.s.) says about forgiveness:

Forgiveness, despite having the power to revenge, is the way and custom of the prophets and the pious. The meaning of **عفو** is that whenever someone commits a crime or fault against you, do not follow him, do not tell him, and forget it completely and do him good more than before (Gilani, *Misbah al-Shariah. Vol.1 p.374*).

5. The Point of View of a Group of Shia and Sunni Commentators

5.1. The Meaning of **عفى الله عنك**: Error and Transgression

A group of commentators have misinterpreted it. Because they believe that forgiveness is meaningless except after committing sins. Zamakhshari, the author of Tafsir Kashaf, accepted the Prophet (PBUH) made a mistake when he gave permission to the hypocrites, and stated in his Tafsir:

عفى الله عنك is an allusion to crime; because forgiveness comes for it. The meaning of the phrase is: you made a mistake and did not do the right thing. And **لِمَ أَدْنَتْ لَهُمْ** is the description of an event due to which forgiveness was done; That is, what happened to you that when they asked you for permission and looked for an excuse, you gave them permission not to go to battle and why did you not hesitate to do so? **حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكَ** means until it becomes clear to you who is telling the truth in the excuse he gives, and who is lying!

Also, there is a narration from Qatadah and Amr Binmoun regarding this verse that "the Messenger of God (PBUH) did two things that he was not commanded to do: one, he allowed the hypocrites not to go to war; And the other one was he took captives. The Almighty God rebuked his holiness for both of these cases (Zamakhshari, al-Kashaf, v.2. p.274).

Jabai considers the Prophet's permission to hypocrites to be improper and says: "It is a small sin; because in good and allowed work, it is not said why you did this work? (Zamakhshari, al-Kashaf, v.2,p.274; Tabari, v.10, p.10,p.100; Siyuti, v.3,p.247; ibn Jawzi, vol.2,p.247; Tha'labi, v.5,p.50; Tabarsi, v.11,p.103; Khazen, v.2,p.367; Qurtubi, v.8,p.154; Tabarsi, v.11,p.103.)

The meaning of **عفى الله عنك** , failure to do the better (**ترك اولى**)

A group of commentators have considered the meaning of **عفى الله عنك** in this verse to be Failure to do the better, and they believe that forgiveness is used both for forgiveness of sins and forgiveness of not doing the better, and in this verse, the meaning of forgiveness is the latter (Alusi, v.5,p.298; Qusheiri, v.2,p.30; Tusi, v.5,p.227; ‘Alam al-Huda, v.2,p.406.). The author of al-Manar considers **ترك اولى** done by the prophet. He says: "This is a gentle rebuke from God Almighty to His beloved Muhammad (pbuh) for his failure to do the better, and it would have been better if he had not been in a hurry to allow the hypocrites until the situation became clear."

He also said about this verse: "The permission of the Prophet (PBUH) was based on his own judgment; Because it was not revealed to him by God before that. Therefore, it is alright for him to make a mistake." (Muhammad reza, v.10.p.464).

Fakhr Razi also considers this action to be failure to do the better and the best and he believes that the Prophet (PBUH) made subjective descision (ijtihad) concerning the hypocrites and gave them permission, and if it is said that God did not perform ijtihad with the hypocrites because of **لم أذنت**, the answer is that God did not absolutely forbid them from giving permission, but after explaining their truth and falsity, He forbade it. It would have been better to wait until the revelation was revealed and the divine Words (Naṣ) revealed. Therefore, there is an error in ijtihad, and it is placed under the rule of "من اجتهد فأخطأ فله أجر واحد" (Fakhr Razi, v.16. p.59)

5.2. The Meaning of **عفى الله عنك** a Prayer and Tribute

A group of commentators consider the phrase **عفى الله عنك** to be a prayer for the life of the Prophet (PBUH) (Tabatabaei, v.9.p.381; Abul Futuh Razi, v.9,p.258) and it has been said, "It is the custom of the Arab people to pray for pardon, mercy, and forgiveness without committing a mistake; Like someone who gives water to a thirsty person and they say in response: " **غفر الله لك** " (God may forgive you.) Or in reaction to someone who sneeze, they say, **يرحمك الله** "May Allah have mercy on you." (Kashefi, v.1, p.411; Kashani, v.4, p.274; Abul Futuh, v.9, p.258; Nizam al-'Araj, v.3,p.475).

'Alamul-Huda also writes about this:

The sentence **عفى الله عنك** cannot be a necessity approving the commitment of a sin or the forgiveness of punishment, rather, it may have meant honoring the Prophet and gentleness of addressing him; Because we also say during addressing someone and without intending to reprimand or punish, **أرأيتَ رجمك الله و غفر الله لك** (May God have mercy on and forgive you, did you see?) While the intention of the speaker was not to forgive the sin, but sometimes he has no idea of the sin of his audience. In these examples, speaking in this way is only to pay tribute to the audience ('Alam al-Huda, v.2, p.405).

Ibn 'Atiyah also says: "In this verse, out of respect for the Prophet (PBUH), God mentioned forgiveness before reproach." (ibn 'Atiyeh, v.3, p.38).

5.3. The Meaning of **عفى الله عنك** from the Aspect of **أيك اعنى و اسمعى يا جاره**

Another group of commentators believe that although this verse is addressed to the Prophet (PBUH) in its surface, the meaning of this address is his Ummah (Tabatabaei, v.9, p.285; Feyz Kashani, v.1, p.468).

The author of the Tafsir *Bayan al-Sa'ada fi maqam al-abada* writes about "أيك اعنى و اسمعى يا جاره":

This way of addressing is one of the nicest ways to address elites; In such a way that one reproaches and blames those close to them but he means something other than that, for the sake of sarcasm and its removal, for the dignity of the addressee and the interlocutor, and before reprimanding, he began to pardon so that he would be a favor to him (Sultan ali Shah, v.10, p.163).

Sheikh Tabarsi writes in the book *Ihtijaj*: Hazrat Rida (a.s.) replied to Ma'mun Abbasi about the verse **عفى الله** and said: It was revealed due to "أيك اعنى و اسمعى يا جاره" which means "I am talking about you; oh you, the neighbor, and you listen." God said to the Prophet (PBUH), but He meant his Ummah (Tabarsi, v.4, p.135; Bahrani, v.2, p.788; Feyd Kashani, v.2, p.345; Sharif Lahiji, v.2, p.270; Jazayeri, v.2, p.312; Huveyzi, v.2, p.224; Qumi Mashhadi, v.2, p.467).

6. Some Interpretive Narratives of the Shia and Sunnis Concerning the Verse

Concerning this verse, several narrations have been mentioned: two narrations from Tafsir al-Burhan-e Bahrani and two narrations from Tafsir Dur al-Manthur Suyuti which we read below.

6.1. Some of the Interpretive Narratives of Shia Concerning the Verse

Ibn Babawayh narrated in his *Sanad* from 'Ali Bin Muhammad bin Juham that he said: "I came to the Ma'mun gatherance. Ali ibn Musa (AS) was also there. Ma'mun turned to him and said, "O Messenger of God, don't you think that the prophets are infallible?" Hazrat said: "Yes." Ma'mun followed up his speech with the following questions: "O Abul Hasan, then What does the verse **عَفَا اللَّهُ عَنْكَ لِمَ أَذْنَتْ لَهُمْ** mean?" Hazrat Rida (a.s.) said, "This is like the famous proverb, 'I am telling you to make the wall hear. In this verse, Almighty God is talking to the Prophet, but He means his Ummah. And also, the verse, 'If you commit polytheism, your deeds will be rewarded.' and you will be one of the losers" (Zumar: 65) and also the verse, "وَلَوْ لَا أَنْ نَبِّئْتَنَّاكَ لَفَدَّتْ كِدْت تَرْكُنْ إِلَيْهِمْ شَيْئاً قَلِيلاً" (al-Isra':74)". Ma'mun said, "You are right, O Messenger of God." (Ibn Babawayh, v.1, p.180; Bahrani, v.2, p.788)

'Ali ibn Ibrahim in Abi-Jaroud's narration from Imam Baqir (AS) said, "concerning the following verse: **عَفَا اللَّهُ عَنْكَ لِمَ أَذْنَتْ لَهُمْ حَتَّى يَتَّبِعَنَّ لَكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَ تَعْلَمُ الْكَافِرِينَ**?" his holiness said: So that those who had an excuse and those who left without an excuse can be distinguished from each other." (Qumi, v.1, p.293; Bahrani, v.2, p.788).

6.2. The Interpretive Narratives of Ahl Al-Sunnah in Concerning the Verse

«أخرج عبدالرزاق في المصنف و ابن جرير عن عمرو بن ميمون الأودي؟ رض؟ قال: «اثنتا فعلهما رسول الله (ص) لم يؤمر فيهما بشيء اذنه للمنافقين واخذه من الأسارى فانزل الله عفا الله عنك لِمَ أَذْنَتْ لَهُم الآية»

Siyuti, in *Tafsir Dur al-Manthor*, mentions a narration from Qatadah and Amr Banimun as follows: "The Messenger of God (PBUH) did two things that were not assigned to him: one, he gave permission to the hypocrites in this incident; And the other is ransoming the captives. God also blamed him for these two." (Siyuti, v.3, p.247).

«و أخرج ابن أبي حاتم و أبو الشيخ عن مورق العجلي؟ رض؟ قال: «سمعت بمعاتبة أحسن من هذا بدأ بالعفو قبل المعاتبة فقال عفا الله عنك لِمَ أَذْنَتْ لَهُم» (سيوطي: الدر المنثور في تفسير بالماثور، ج3، ص247).

He also narrated a narration from Mujahid as follows: "Have you heard a better forgiveness than this, that before God reprimands the Prophet (PBUH), he begins the verse with his forgiveness?" (Siyuti, v.3, p.247)

7. Evaluation

In this noble verse, a group of Sunni commentators do not regard an absolute innocency for the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.). They consider it is alright for the Prophet (pbuh) to committ sins and do not consider the Prophet (pbuh) immune from mistakes. One of the points that they refer to is this: God clearly says <عفى الله عنك>; God will forgive you. So, the Prophet (PBUH) has sinned, because God's forgiveness follows sins and mistakes. They put their finger on the word of عفو (forgiveness) in <عفى الله عنك> and say that forgiveness comes after committing sins. They also say: the sentence <لم أذنت لهم> has the tone of reproach which means "Why did you do that?"; It means, you shouldn't have done that. They used these two sentences in the mentioned verse to regard some kind of slip for the Holy Prophet (p.b.u.h.).

They have only stuck to the appearance of the verse and interpreted it in such a way that the infallibility of the Prophet (PBUH) is tarnished. But if they looked at the preceding and following verses

and considered the context (siyaq) of the verse, they would have known correctly that it never means reprehending.

A group of commentators, such as Zamakhshari, consider the verse " **عَفَى اللَّهُ عَنْكَ** " to be about the issuance of sins by the Prophet (PBUH). With the idea that forgiveness has no meaning except after sin. This argument is rejected (Tabatabaei, v.9, p.286). And also, the words of al-Jubbā'ī, who considers it a small sin (*gonah Saqireh*) and believes that if an action is allowed, no one will say why you did this. This is not the correct word; Because when a person sees someone who has abandoned a better work and devoted himself to a good work, he blames him why you do this, and you did not do that which would have been better (Tabarsi, v.5, p.52).

Also, by looking at the verse **لَوْ خَرَجُوا فِيكُمْ مَا زَادُوكُمْ** (Tawbah, 47), hypocrites' fleeing from Jihad and their violation of this order is the first and right thing to do; Also, the hypocrites disbelief and hypocrisy would have been revealed to them in the past. It is not true that the permission of the Prophet (PBUH) was based on his own ijtihad. Because based on the verse **وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ** (Najm, 3-4), the words of the Prophet (PBUH) are not from his inner wills and he does not say anything out of his own interest and opinion, but everything he says about this is a revelation from the Almighty God (Tabatabaei, v.19, p.42). Also, why do they say that he gave permission out of his own ijtihad?! Where in surah Noor, the verse **إِذَا اسْتَأْذَنُوكَ لِبَعْضِ شَأْنِهِمْ فَأَذَنْ لِمَنْ شِئْتَ مِنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرَ لَهُمُ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ** (Noor, 62) the Prophet was given authority to give permission and it was proper for him to give permission on behalf of God to his soldiers (Javadi 'Amuli, Tafsir Noor:62).

In Surah Anfal (Anfal: 67), the reproach addressing the Prophet (PBUH) is not correct; Because no prophet should keep captives and there is no verse or tradition that the Prophet (pbuh) ordered his soldiers to take captives, but it appears from the narrations of the story of Badr that when the Prophet (pbuh) orders to kill some captives, people are afraid that may he not want to kill all the captives! Therefore, ransom is proposed by them to strengthen the financial mechanism of the army. God reprimands these proposers and says: **تُرِيدُونَ عَرَضَ الدُّنْيَا وَاللَّهُ يُرِيدُ الْآخِرَةَ** (Anfal:67). This is the best evidence that only the believers have been blamed, not his holiness, nor the believers. And it is the best evidence that most of the narrations that are considered he was reprimanded are fake and one of the tricks of the enemies of Islam (Tabatabaei, v.9, p.289).

It is stated in the traditions of Ahl Sunnah: **فَإِذَا اسْتَأْذَنُوكَ لِبَعْضِ شَأْنِهِمْ فَأَذَنْ لِمَنْ شِئْتَ مِنْهُمْ** (Noor: 62) and after the verse **عَفَى اللَّهُ عَنْكَ** it is stated (Siyuti, v.3, p.247) it is not true; Because the verse **فَإِذَا اسْتَأْذَنُوكَ** was revealed before the event of Tabuk, and this event occurred at the end of the emigration of the Prophet (PBUH) and after the conquest of Makkah.

2.8. The Preferred Tafsir

It seems that the best tafsir of this verse is from 'Allameh Tabatabayi and those who have the same opinion with him. 'Allameh interpreted it by looking at the context (siyaq) of the verse (Tawbah: 46-47) and a narration from 'Uyun Akhbar al-Reza. He believes that the sentence **عَفَى اللَّهُ عَنْكَ** is a supplication for the life of the Prophet (PBUH). He adds:

The verses 46-47 of Surah At-Tawbah wants to say that the hypocrisy and lying of wrongdoers is obvious and they disgrace themselves with a little test. This position necessitates to address and rebuke the audience. This is one of the codes of speech, which is meant only to express the point clearly and does not mean more than that. It is just like the famous proverb, "I tell you door to make the wall hear!" which does not mean to match (Tabatabaei, v.9, p.285).

Conclusion

As mentioned, some of the Sunni commentators, taking into account the appearance of the verse and not paying attention to its context, relying on (عفى الله عنك) and (لم أدنت لهم) wanted to prove that the holy Prophet has made a kind of slip. Because they consider the Prophet (PBUH) is allowed to commit sin and do not consider him immune from mistakes. However, some Shiite commentators, after examining the verses and traditions, and also considering the context of the verse, believe that the phrase "عفو الله عنك" is a prayer for the life of the Prophet (PBUH) and "reprimand" is basically a rebuke of the hypocrites who ran away from Jihad. And the revelation of this verse is known as "اعنى و اسمعى يا جاره". It means "I tell you and O neighbor you listen". As a result, the interpretation of the Firiqin commentators is different according to their attitude towards the infallibility of the Prophet (PBUH).

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