

From the Words of Shaykh ‘Uthaymeen
A BRIEF WORD TO THE WISE ON
DISCRIMINATING BETWEEN THE CONCEPTS
OF EQUALITY AND JUSTICE¹

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

Maintaining justice is obligatory in all matters where equality is mandatory. Included in that is being just in one’s conduct towards Allah, for which Allah will bestow upon you His favours. And from being just is that you show your gratitude to Him. Allah makes clear the truth to you, and so from being just is that you follow the truth. Being just towards the creation is also included in that. Being just can be defined here as **treating the people the way you liked to be treated**. And this is why the Prophet (ﷺ) said,

مَنْ أَحَبَّ أَنْ يُزْحَرَ مِنَ النَّارِ وَيَدْخُلَ الْجَنَّةَ فَلْتُدْرِكْهُ مَنِيَّتُهُ وَهُوَ يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَيَأْتِي إِلَى النَّاسِ مَا يُحِبُّ أَنْ يُؤْتَى إِلَيْهِ

Whoever loves to be rescued from the Fire and to enter Paradise, then death should reach him whilst believing in Allāh and the Last Day, and let him do unto others what he wishes to be done unto himself.²

So treat the people how you would like the people to treat you. For example, if you wish to deal with the people in a particular manner, first apply it to yourself by asking, **‘if the people were to treat you like this, would you be happy?’** If the answer is in the affirmative, then proceed; otherwise, do not. Being just between your children in terms of what you give them is also included in that. The Prophet (ﷺ) said,

¹ Translated by Abu Ameenah AbdurRahman Bennett. Taken from *Sharh al-Aqeeqah al-Wāsiṭiyyah*.

² Sunan Abi Dāwood (4236)

اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَاَعْدِلُوا بَيْنَ اَوْلَادِكُمْ.

“Have taqwā of Allah and be just between your children.”³

Being just when distributing inheritance also comes under this. Each person should be given their allocated share. Being just towards co-wives⁴ also falls under this, by dividing your time justly between them. Even being just to oneself enters under this. He should not burden himself beyond his scope. Therefore, your Lord has a right over you and so does your nafs!

Here we must caution against some people who use the word *المساواة* (equality) as a synonym for *العدل* (justice). This is an error! We should not use the term equality because the term implies equality between two things even though conventional wisdom requires a distinction. As a result of this unjust call to equality, people have begun to challenge the differences between the male and the female and wish to synthesise between the both. This call to equality as gone to such extremes that the communist rhetorically asks, **“What is the difference between the ruler and the people he rules over? No person should have any authority over another person, not even a father over his son!”**⁵

When we use the term *العدل* (justice), which means to give everything its deserved due, this precarious concept (i.e., equality) is removed and the term is preserved according to its valid meaning. For this reason, you will never find in the Qur’an any verse that states Allah enjoins equality (*التسوية*); however, what you will find are verses such as

﴿إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُ بِالْعَدْلِ﴾

Verily, Allah enjoins al-adl (justice).

[An Nahl 90]

And,

³ Sahih Muslim (1623)

⁴ [TN]: The Prophet said, **“When a man has two wives and he is inclined to one of them, he will come on the Day of resurrection with a side hanging down.”** [Sunan Abu Dāwūd (2133)]

⁵ [TN]: One has to wonder what the Shaykh would have said during this current climate wherein equality is demanded in virtually everything! In western societies, the idea of equality between the sexes has become the true bench mark for justice.

وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تُؤَدُّوا الْأَمَانَاتِ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهَا وَإِذَا حَكَمْتُمْ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ أَنْ تَحْكُمُوا
بِالْعَدْلِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ نِعِمَّا يَعِظُكُمْ بِهِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا ٥٨

Verily! Allah commands that you should render back the trusts to those to whom they are due; and that when you judge between men, you judge with justice.

[An Nisā' 58]

It is an error to attribute to Islam the proclamation that says, “**The religion of Islam is a religion of equality!**” Rather, the religion of Islam is a religion of justice. And therefore, **it synthesises between things that should be equal and distinguishes between things that should be separated.** If, however, someone uses the term ‘equality’ with the meaning of ‘justice’, then he is correct in concept but wrong in his choice of word. [Interestingly], whenever the term ‘equality’ is mentioned in the Qur’an, it comes in a negative context:

قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ٩

Say: "Are those who know equal to those who know not?"

[Az Zumar 9]

And,

قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ أَمْ هَلْ تَسْتَوِي الظُّلُمَاتُ وَالنُّورُ ١٦

Say: “Is the blind equal to the one who sees? Or darkness equal to light?”

And,

لَا يَسْتَوِي الْقَاعِدُونَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ غَيْرُ أُولِي الضَّرَرِ وَالْمُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ ١٥

Not equal are those of the believers who sit (at home), except those who are disabled (by injury or are blind or lame, etc.), and those who strive hard and fight In the Cause of Allah with their wealth and their lives.

[An Nisa"95]

Nowhere in the Qur'an is there an edict for equality; on the contrary, what it does command is justice.⁶

⁶ [TN]: The Shaykh is not negating the existence of equality in Islam because the basic ruling is that men and women are generally equal in terms of upholding legal obligations. The Shaykh is merely saying that every call of equality in Islam is justice but that justice does not always necessitate equality. They are not the truest of synonyms.