

Surah 33. Al-Ahzab

Asad: NEVER has God endowed any man with two hearts in one body:² and [just as] He has never made your wives whom you may have declared to be "as unlawful to you as your mothers' bodies" [truly] your mothers,³ so, too, has He never made your adopted sons [truly] your sons:⁴ these are but [figures of] speech uttered by your mouths - whereas God speaks the [absolute] truth:⁵ and it is He alone who can show [you] the right path.

Malik: Allah has not put two hearts in a person's body: nor does He regard your wives whom you divorce through Zihar (divorcing a wife saying; from now on you are as my mother, depriving her conjugal rights yet keeping her like a slave nor letting her marry anyone else) as your mothers: nor does He regard your adopted sons as your sons. These are mere words which you utter with your mouths; but Allah declares the Truth and guides you to the Right Way.

Pickthall: Allah hath not assigned unto any man two hearts within his body, nor hath he made your wives whom ye declare (to be your mothers) your mothers, nor hath he made those whom ye claim (to be your sons) your sons. This is but a saying of your mouths. But Allah sayeth the truth and He soweth the way.

Yusuf Ali: Allah has not made for any man two hearts in his (one) body: nor has He made your wives whom ye divorce by Zihar your mothers: nor has He made your adopted sons your sons. Such is (only) your (manner of) speech by your mouths. But Allah tells (you) the Truth and He shows the (right) Way. ³⁶⁶⁹
^{3670 3671}

Transliteration: Ma jaAAala Allahu lirajulin min qalbayni fee jawfihi wama jaAAala azwajakumu allae tuthahiroona minhunna ommahatikum wama jaAAala adAAiyaakum abnaakum thalikum qawlukum bafw^{ah}ikum waAllahu yaqoolu al^haqqa wahuwa yahdee al^ssabeela
Khattab:

Allah does not place two hearts in any person's chest. Nor does He regard your wives as ?unlawful for you like? your real mothers, ?even? if you say they are.¹ Nor does He regard your adopted children as your real children.² These are only your baseless assertions. But Allah declares the truth, and He ?alone? guides to the ?Right? Way.

Author Comments

2 - Lit., "within him". In the first instance, this connects with the preceding passage, implying that man cannot be truly conscious of God and at the same time defer to the views of "the deniers of the truth and the hypocrites" (Razi). Beyond this, however, the above sentence forms a conceptual link with the sequence, which states that it is against the God-willed laws of nature - and, therefore, unreasonable and morally inadmissible - to attribute to one and the same person two mutually incompatible roles within the framework of human relationships (Zamakhshari).

3 - This is a reference to the pre-Islamic Arabian custom called zihar, whereby a husband could divorce his wife by simply declaring, "Thou art [henceforth as unlawful] to me as my mother's back", the term zahr ("back") being in this case a metonym for "body". In pagan Arab society, this mode of divorce was considered final and irrevocable; but a woman thus divorced was not allowed to remarry, and had to remain forever in her former husband's custody. As is evident from the first four verses of surah {58} (Al-Mujadalah) - which was revealed somewhat earlier than the present surah - this cruel pagan custom had already been abolished by the time of the revelation of the above verse, and is mentioned here only as an illustration of the subsequent dictum that the "figures of speech [lit., "your sayings"] which you utter with your mouths" do not necessarily coincide with the reality of human relations.

4 - I.e., in the sense of blood relationship: hence, the marriage restrictions applying to real sons - and, by obvious implication, daughters as well - do not apply to adoptive children. This statement has a definite bearing on verses {37} ff. below.

5 - Sc., by bringing into being the factual, biological relationship of parent and child in distinction from all man-made, social relationships like husband and wife, or foster-parent and adoptive child. In this connection it should be borne in mind that the Qur'an frequently uses the metaphor of God's "speech" to express His creative activity.

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This divorce (called ?ihâr) was commonly practiced in Arabia before the Prophet (?). If a man declared his wife as unlawful for him as the ?ahr (back) of his mother, his wife would be divorced. Islam abolished this type of divorce (see 58:3-4).

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The following distinction should be made:

1. Sponsorship (which is permissible): a person can sponsor a child or host them in their home and care for them as they care for their own children, except for legal matters. For example, adopted children keep their last names, are allowed to marry the children of their adopted parent, adopted

and biological children of the opposite sex should dress modestly in front of each other, and do not have a share in the estate of their adopted parents, but can get a share of inheritance (up to one-third of the estate) through bequest (wa?iyah).

2. Adoption: a person is not allowed to take an orphan and give them his/her last name, give them a share of inheritance similar to their own children, etc.

3669 - "Two hearts in his (one) breast": two inconsistent attitudes: such as serving Allah and Mammon; or subscribing to both Truth and Superstition; or hypocritically pretending one thing and intending another. Such a thing is against Allah's Law and Will. Apart from the condemnation of general hypocrisy, two pagan customs of the Times of Ignorance are mentioned, and their iniquity pointed out. See the notes 3670 and 3671.

3670 - This was an evil Arab custom. He pronounced words importing that she was like his mother. See also lviii. 1-5. where this is condemned in the strongest terms and punishment is provided for it. A man sometimes said such words in a fit of anger; they did not affect him, but they degraded her position.

3671 - If a man called another's son "his son", it might create complications with natural and normal relationships if taken too literally. It is pointed out that it is only a facon de parler in men's mouths, and should not be taken literally. The truth is the truth and cannot be altered by men's adopting "sons". "Adoption" in the technical sense is not allowed in Muslim Law. Those who have been "wives of your sons proceeding from your loins" are within the Prohibited Degrees of marriage; iv. 23: but this does not apply to "adopted" sons.

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