

'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:



A Muslim person has the duty to listen and obey, in whatever he likes or dislikes, unless he is ordered to disobey God. If he is ordered some disobedience of God, then he neither listens nor obeys.⁽¹⁾

From the Qur'an

- ﴿Believers, obey God and obey the Messenger and those from among you who have been entrusted with authority.﴾ (4: 59)
- ﴿Nor disobey you in anything reasonable.﴾ (60: 12)

The Narrator

Abu 'Abd al-Raḥmān 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb ibn Nufayl belonged to the 'Adiy branch of the Quraysh. He embraced Islam when he was young. At the time of the Battle of Uḥud, he was too young to fight. His first military effort was the Encounter of the Moat, i.e. al-Khandaq. He also participated in the pledge under the tree. He narrated much useful information and numerous hadiths from the Prophet, and issued many fatwas. He died in Year 74 AH 694 CE.

Summary

Every Muslim is duty-bound to listen and obey those who are in charge of the affairs of the Muslim community, unless he or she are bidden to disobey God. No person may be obeyed in what constitutes disobedience of God, the Creator.

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 7144; Muslim, 1839.



Message and Meaning

The Prophet (peace be upon him) makes clear for his community that obedience is due to those who are in charge of community affairs, such as kings, presidents, heads of state and their deputies. Such obedience is essential for the stability of life, the spread of religion and the implementation of its commandments and rulings. Were it permissible for everyone to disobey their governors, things would be in chaos and the Muslim community would be disunited. The enemy would then find it all too easy to overcome them.

Therefore, the Prophet emphasizes the duty of obeying the ruler. He said: 'I urge you to remain God-fearing, and to listen and obey, even though you happen to be under an Abyssinian slave'.⁽¹⁾

Indeed, the Prophet makes clear that it is our duty to obey the ruler and to endure what we dislike. If the ruler behaves wrongly, the fact that we dislike what he does should not make us disobey him, creating division within the community. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'Whoever dislikes something done by his ruler should remain patient. Whoever moves away from the community, even by a hand span and dies in that position, he will have died like the people of ignorance'.⁽²⁾

However, such obedience is not absolute; it is restricted to what is permissible. If the ruler orders something that is sinful, then a Muslim must neither listen nor obey. The Prophet (peace be upon him) says: 'Obedience is only in what is reasonable'.⁽³⁾ Hence, God says: 'Believers, obey God and obey the Messenger and those from among you who have been entrusted with authority'. (4: 59) He does not make the obedience of rulers an unqualified order. Indeed, he makes it subject to the obedience of God and His Messenger.

If the ruler orders something sinful, it is not permissible to obey him in this particular matter. It is not meant as disobeying him in all matters. Moreover, it is not permissible to rebel against him for having issued such an order. What is recommended for a Muslim is to take issue with the ruler, giving him good and wise counsel. It is important for Muslims to forego their personal interests and desires in order to preserve the unity of the Muslim community.

It is not permissible to contend with a ruler concerning his authority, nor to call on people to pledge allegiance to another person, nor to declare general disobedience, except in the scenario of him clearly becoming an unbeliever, and then he is removed by the unanimity of the community. 'Ubādah ibn al-Şāmit narrated: 'God's Messenger invited us and we gave him our pledges. What he stipulated for us included that we pledged to him to listen and obey in what is pleasant and unpleasant, hard and easy and when others are given preference to us, and that we do not contend against rulers. He said: 'Unless you see blatant disbelief for which you have God's clear evidence'.⁽⁴⁾

1 Related by Abu Dāwūd, 4607; al-Tirmidhī, 2676; Ibn Mājah, 42.

2 Related by al-Bukhari, 7143.

3 Related by al-Bukhari, 7145; Muslim, 1840.

4 Related by al-Bukhari, 7055, 7056; Muslim, 1709.

Implementation



A Muslim should consider the public interest ahead of personal interests. Obeying the ruler serves the community through the implementation of Islam and keeps peace.



When a Muslim sees that the ruler is doing something contrary to Islam, he should go to scholars and ask them about it, seeking their advice. It may be that he is wrong and that he sees matters from an incorrect perspective.



When a Muslim has made certain that the ruler's order requires the doing of what is sinful, it is not permissible for him to obey such. If he can give advice to the ruler, this becomes his duty. If not and he cannot disobey, he should migrate.



It is not permissible to obey anyone in what constitutes disobedience of God. The Prophet (peace be upon him) asked people to pledge to him obedience in what is reasonable, and he never ordered nor countenanced any kind of disobedience of God. This applies in a greater measure to other people.



Never try to appease a ruler in what pertains to God's commands and prohibitions. You may either reject what is contrary to that and give proper advice, or leave.



God's Messenger (peace be upon him) dispatched a military expedition, assigning its command to one man from the Anṣār, and ordered them to listen and obey him. They incurred his displeasure about something. He said: Gather some wood for me, and they did. He then said: light up a fire for me, and they did. He then said to them: Has not God's Messenger (peace be upon him) commanded you to listen to me and obey me? They said: He did. He said: Then, get into the fire. They looked at one another, and said: We have fled to God's Messenger in order to escape the fire. They were in this condition, until his anger subsided and the fire was extinguished. When they returned, they mentioned this to the Prophet. He said: "Had they entered it, they would not be let out of it. Obedience is due only in what is good and reasonable".⁽¹⁾



If the ruler orders some disobedience of God, this does not mean he is not to be disobeyed altogether. He is only to be obeyed in what does not constitute disobedience of God.

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 7145; Muslim, 1840.

