

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

OBEY ALLAH (GOD) AND THE MESSENGER

Joseph A Islam

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Please note: For the purposes of this article, the terms 'Messenger' and 'Prophet' have been used interchangeably, though they carry very different meanings in the Quran. The essence behind the interchangeable usage is to imply 'God appointed agents' and not to necessarily delve into the differences. **(Please see related article in the Final Thoughts section entitled 'End of Prophethood' which elucidate the terms)**

There is often a great misunderstanding amongst many Muslims with the frequently used phrase below and what it represents. Its true purport can only be best understood from the Quran itself. This phrase is sometimes used to justify all manner of actions, doctrines and practices from [Islamic secondary sources](#) which often have no support from the Quran.

أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ

OBEY GOD AND THE MESSENGER
(ATI-ULLAHA WARASULA)

The linkage of the above term with [Islamic secondary sources](#) is often conveyed as follows:

'God asked us to obey the messenger so we must obey his actions which are found in the Hadith and Sunna'

Let us first note the usage of the term '**Ati-ullah warasula**' from the Quran.

003:032

"Say: "Obey God and His Messenger" (Arabic: Ati-ullah warasula): But if they turn back, God loves not those who reject Faith"

قُلْ أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ فَإِن تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْكٰفِرِينَ

Ati-ullah warasula

Illustration - Joseph Islam

This can also be seen in **verses 47:33** and **9:71** as well as many other examples.

The first question to ask is who the primary addressees of this verse were and who were those that were actually being disobedient to God and the Messenger? Secondly, what actually constitutes disobedience in the light of the Quran?

WHO WERE BEING DISOBEDIENT AND WHO WERE BEING ASKED TO OBEY?

(1) MUNAFIQS (HYPOCRITES)

024:047

"And they say: **We believe in God and in the messenger and we obey**; then a party of them turn back after this, **and these are not believers**"

(2) BELIEVERS ARE WARNED

058:009

"O you who believe! when you confer together in private, do not give to each other counsel of sin and revolt **and disobedience to the Messenger**, and give to each other counsel of goodness and guarding (against evil); and be careful of (your duty to) God, to Whom you shall be gathered together"

(3) TO THE PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

007.157

"Those who follow the messenger, the **gentile prophet**, whom they find mentioned in their own (scriptures), in the law and the Gospel; for he commands them what is just and forbids them what is evil; he allows them as lawful what is good (and pure) and prohibits them from what is bad (and impure); He releases them from their heavy burdens and from the yokes that are upon them. So it is those who believe in him, honour him, **help him, and follow the light which is sent down with him**,- it is they who will prosper."

SO WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO OBEY THE MESSENGER?

The first directive was clearly to the contemporaries of the Prophet who were the direct addressees. They were being instructed to trust in **the Prophet's authority** in the message he was delivering and acting on.

For example:

024:051	Allow the Prophet to judge between your disputes
004:059	Listen to the Prophet and those given authority and if there is a dispute, take it to the Prophet to resolve. This is a better way.
033:033	The wives of the Prophet - Obey the Messenger
049:014	To those that have not yet had faith fully entered into their hearts. Obey God and the Prophet
008:046	Do not fall into disputes - Obey God and the Prophet
024:048	Don't turn away like the Munafiqs (Hypocrites) when they are called to God and His Prophet that he may judge between them
008:001	In the matter of 'gain / windfalls' and to end your disputes - Obey God and the Prophet

Therefore, 'Obey the Messenger' meant obedience to his authority. This understanding also finds support in the following verse where it is clear that it was not only the Prophet that needed to be obeyed, but also those in authority.

004.059

"O ye who believe! Obey God, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you. Then if you disagree in anything among yourselves, refer it to God and His Messenger, if ye do believe in God and the Last Day: That is best, and most suitable for final determination"

THE MESSAGE IS CONNECTED TO 'MUHAMMAD' IN HIS CAPACITY AS 'MESSENGER'

The Quran repeatedly announces obedience to the **messenger**. The Quran **never** conveys the instruction to obey 'Muhammad', albeit they are the same person. The significance of this specific address by the title 'messenger' is often not appreciated. The 'message' remained **connected** to the 'messenger' and it was in this capacity of the 'messenger' that Muhammad ^(pbuh) needed to be obeyed.

The Quran never demanded obedience to 'Muhammad' in his personal preferences and choices. In fact, a stark warning was given to Prophet Muhammad if he so much as introduced any personal preferences in the matter of God's ordained 'deen'.

066:001

"O Prophet! Why do you ban that which God has made lawful for you, seeking to please thy wives? And God is Forgiving, Merciful"

069:044-48

"And if the messenger were to invent any sayings in Our name, **We should certainly seize him by his right hand, And We should certainly then cut off the artery of his heart:** Nor could any of you withhold him (from Our wrath). But verily this is a Message for the God-fearing"

The Quran in fact only makes use of the name 'Muhammad' four times in the entire scripture (3:144, 33:40, 47:2, 48:29). All these verses clearly emphasise his capacity as a messenger of God.

In the following verse, we note the instruction to 'Obey the messenger' in the message that he brought. His only duty was to convey that message in truth and act on the guidance from it.

024:054

"Say: "Obey God, and obey the Messenger: but if ye turn away, **he is only responsible for the duty placed on him and ye for that placed on you.** If ye obey him, ye shall be on right guidance. **The Messenger's duty is only to preach the clear (Message)**"

This is again repeated in 64:12 and can be seen in 5:92

WAS THIS EXCLUSIVE TO PROPHET MUHAMMAD? ^(pbuh)

NO - All messengers were to be obeyed by their respective communities (4:64)

004:064

"**We sent not a messenger, but to be obeyed,** in accordance with the will of God. If they had only, when they were unjust to themselves, come unto thee and asked God's forgiveness, and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found God indeed Oft-returning, Most Merciful"

WHAT ELSE COULD CONSTITUTE OBEYING THE MESSENGER?

It is clear that the main directive of obedience to God and his messenger was to the people to whom the scripture was being revealed. They were being instructed to obey God and His messenger, the purpose being one, to deliver the message in truth to the people and to act on its guidance. This has always been the case, even with Prophets before.

Time specific examples of obeying the messenger:

- 049:007 The Prophet of God is among you!
- 049:003 Subdue your voices in his presence
- 008:020 **Obey God and the Messenger** - Do not turn away from him when he speaks!
- 008:024 Respond to God and his Prophet - when he calls you (Arabic: Astajibu)

OBEY THE PROPHET IN WHAT IS JUST

Prophets and messengers were chosen for a specific purpose. God would not choose helpers who were misleaders.

018:051 (Part)

"...nor choose I misleaders for (My) helpers" (Arabic: wa ma kuntu muttakhidal-muhdileen adudan)

However, a very significant phrase is to be noted in the following verse which clearly signifies the importance of not obeying anyone who may appear at any point not to be right. This consideration even applied when obeying the Prophet in matters. It is inconceivable that a prophet of God would ever intentionally mislead (18:51). However, this does not rule out human errors.

Please note carefully the following verse and the limits captured for believing women with regards the oath of allegiance to the Prophet. The relevant phrase has been highlighted.

060.012

"O Prophet! When believing women come to you taking oath of allegiance / pledge to you that they will not associate in worship any other thing whatsoever with God, that they will not steal, that they will not commit adultery (or fornication), that they will not kill their children, , nor produce any lie that they have devised between their hands and feet **and that they will not disobey you in any matter that is right (Arabic: fi ma-rufin)**,- then accept their pledge and pray to God for the forgiveness (of their sins): for God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful"

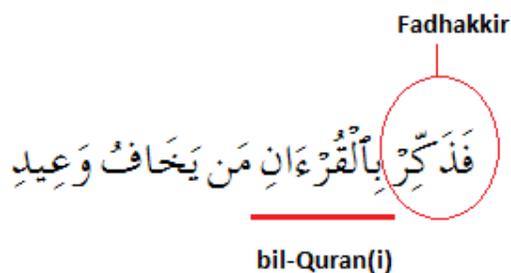
Therefore, obedience to the Prophet of God or a messenger is limited to what is known to be good or a matter that is right.

HOW DID THE PROPHET GUIDE HIS PEOPLE?

By the message that was revealed to him:

050:045

"We know best what they say, and you are not one to compel them; **therefore remind him by means of the Quran (Arabic: Fadhakkir bil-Quran(i))** who fears My threat"



006:019

"Say: What thing is the weightiest in testimony? Say: God is witness between you and me; and this Quran has been inspired (Arabic: Wauhiya) in me that with it I may warn you and whomsoever it reaches. Do you really bear witness that there are other gods with Allah? Say: I do not bear witness. Say: He is only one God, and surely I am clear of that which you set up (with Him)"

HOW DO WE OBEY THE PROPHET NOW?

First and foremost - To **understand** what he has left us and then to follow it in truth. No doubt, the best way to follow the messenger and obey him is to follow the guidance that he was directed to follow through inspiration.

033.002

"And follow that which is inspired in you from thy Lord. Lo! God is Aware of what ye do.

FINAL THOUGHTS

God instructed Prophet Muhammad ^(pbuh) to follow what was inspired in him (33:2 above). It is also clear that the Quran was inspired in him for mankind's guidance (6:19 above). With the Quran, Prophet Muhammad ^(pbuh) was asked to warn mankind (50:45 above). Obeying the messenger meant obedience to his authority who dealt with matters in light of the Quran. Others in authority were also expected to be obeyed in much the same way the Prophet was asked to be obeyed. This is clearly a matter of authority.

As the Prophet is not alive today, he cannot judge between our disputes nor can he exercise his authority in light of the Quran. Therefore, this task falls on those in authority amongst us who are responsible for addressing their community matters in light of the Quran.

However, to claim that the term 'Obey God and the Messenger' is a reference to the [Islamic secondary sources](#) is unjustified from the Quran's own perspective.

Related Articles:

- (1) [End of Prophethood](#)
- (2) [Does 'Hikmah' \(Wisdom\) Mean Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad? ^{\(pbuh\)}](#)

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