

Misquoted Verse #15

5:51 O ye who believe! take not the Jews and the Christians for your friends: They are but friends to each other. And he amongst you that turns to them is of them. Verily Allah guideth not a people unjust.

The first point to be noted is that, in the verse above, the word **Awliya** is **often incorrectly translated as friends** (Awliya is the plural and its singular is wali and the concept is walaah). As a result, many people are under the misconception that this verse commands Muslims to distance themselves from Non-Muslims and to avoid friendship with them. This is far from the truth, as we shall see after examining the meaning of the word *Awliya*. The Qur'an says:

3:122 ...Allah was their WALI (protector), and in Allah should the faithful (Ever) put their trust.

This verse indicates that a wali is one in whom trust is placed for protection, as the Qur'an always declares God the protector, wali, of the righteous. As Dr. Saeed Ismail Sieny concludes his discussion on Walaah by writing:

As we have discovered above, the root of the word "al-walaah" does not include love, support, etc., and that **the core meaning rests on guardianship**. (Sieny, *The Relationship Between Muslims and Non-Muslims*; Toronto, Al-Attique Publishers Inc., 2000, p. 102, emphasis added)

And Dr. Muzammil Siddiqi writes:

In the verse you quoted, the word "Awliya" is used. It is a plural and its singular is "wali". **The correct translation of the word "'wali'" is not "friend" but it is someone who is very close and intimate. It is also used to mean "guardian, protector, patron, lord and master"**. In the Qur'an this word is used for God, such as

"Allah is the Protector (or Lord and Master) of those who believe. He takes them out from the depths of darkness to light..." (*Al-Baqarah: 257*)

There are many other references in the Qur'an that give this meaning. The same word is also sometimes used in the Qur'an for human beings, such as "And whosoever is killed unjustly, We have granted his next kin "wali" the authority (to seek judgment or punishment in this case)..."(*Al-'Isra' :33*) (SOURCE emphasis added)

It becomes clear that the word *Awliya* cannot be taken as simply referring to friendship, as it contains a much more complex meaning, including dependence and guardianship. Therefore, a more accurate translation of the verse would be:

5:51 O ye who believe! take not the Jews and the Christians for your *protectors*: They are but *protectors* to each other. And he amongst you that turns to them is of them. Verily Allah guideth not a people unjust.

Therefore, the referred verse does not prohibit friendship with Non-Muslims at all. Dr. Muzammil Siddiqi writes:

The Qur'an does not say that non-Muslims cannot be Muslims' friends, nor does it forbid Muslims to be friendly to non-Muslims. There are many non-Muslims who are good friends of Muslim individuals and the Muslim community. There are also many good Muslims who truly and sincerely observe their faith and are very friendly to many non-Muslims at the same time. Islam teaches us that we should be friendly to all people. Islam teaches us that we should deal even with our enemies with justice and fairness. Allah says in the Qur'an in the beginning of the same Surah Al-Ma'dah:

"O you who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah as witnesses to fair dealings and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just, that is next to piety. Fear Allah, indeed Allah is well-acquainted with all that you do." (*Al-Ma'dah :8*)

In another place in the Qur'an, Allah Almighty says:

"Allah forbids you not with regard to those who fight you not for your faith, nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them. For Allah loves those who are just. Allah only forbids you with regard to those who fight you for your faith, and drive you out of your homes and support others in driving you out, from turning to them for protection (or taking them as wali). Those who seek their protection they are indeed wrong-doers." (*Al-Mumtahinah: 8-9*)

Moreover, Allah Almighty has described Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, as "a mercy" to the worlds. He was a sign of Allah's Mercy to all, Muslims as well as non-Muslims. In his kindness and fair treatment he did not make any difference between the believers and non-believers. He was kind to the pagans of Makkah and fought them only when they fought him. He made treaties with the Jews of Madinah and honored the treaties until they broke them. He, peace and blessings be upon him, is reported to have received the Christians of Najran with kindness in his Masjid in Madinah. They argued with him about Islam, but he returned them with honor and respect. There are many examples from his life that show that he was the friendliest person to all people. (SOURCE)

And as Muhammad Asad writes:

As regards the meaning of the "alliance" referred to here, see 3:28, and more particularly 4: 139 and the corresponding note, which explains the reference to a believer's loss of his moral identity if he imitates the way of life of, or-in Qur'anic terminology-"allies himself" with, non-Muslims. However, as has been made abundantly clear in 60: 7-9 (and implied in verse 57 of this Surah), this prohibition of a "moral alliance" with non-Muslims does not constitute an injunction against normal, friendly relations

with such of them as are well-disposed towards Muslims. **It should be borne in mind that the term wall has several shades of meaning: "ally", "friend", "helper", "protector", etc. The choice of the particular term - and sometimes a -combination of two terms-is always dependent on the context.** (Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an*, emphasis added)

The second point to note is that although this verse makes a general statement, **the ruling is specific** and is to be applied in a context similar to the historical context. Shaykh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi wrote about this topic extensively in response to a similar question:

[The answer to this is that **these verses are not unconditional**, to be applied to every Jew, Christian, or non-Muslim. Interpreting them in this manner contradicts the injunctions of the Qur'an which **enjoin affection and kindness to the good and peace-loving peoples of every religion**, as well as the verses which permit marriage to the women of the People of the Book, with all that Allah says concerning marriage and He has put love and mercy between you" (30:21)

and the verse concerning the Christians:

And thou wilt find those who say, 'Surely we are Christians,' to be nearest to them (the Muslims in affection...(5:82)

The verses cited above [verse 5:51] were revealed in connection with those people who were hostile to Islam and made war upon the

Muslims. **Accordingly, it is not permissible for the Muslims to support or assist them - that is, to be their ally- nor to entrust them with secrets at the expense of his own religion and community.** This point is explained in other verses, in which Allah, The Most High, says:

They will spare nothing to ruin you; they yearn for what makes you suffer. Hatred has been expressed by their mouths, but what their hearts conceal is still greater. Thus have We made clear to you the revelations (or signs), if you possess understanding. Ah! You love them, but they do not love you...(3:118-119)

This ayah throws light on the character of such people, who conceal great enmity and hatred against the Muslims in their hearts and whose tongues express some of the effects of such hostility. (Al-Qaradawi, *Al-Halal Wal Haram Fil Islam*; US American Trust Publications, 1994, p. 340, emphasis added)

As Shaykh Qaradawi mentioned, verse 5:11 cannot possibly be taken as a prohibition of friendship since the Qur'an allows Muslim men to marry women from the People of the Book:

5:5 ... virtuous women of the believers and the virtuous women of those who received the Scripture before you are lawful for you...

And the Qur'an describes the relationship of marriage to be a relationship with the deepest bond of love:

30:21 And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts): verily in that are Signs for those who reflect.

Also note that the Qur'an says:

60:8-9 Allah does not forbid you respecting those who have not made war against you on account of [your] religion, and have not driven you forth from your homes, that you show "Birr" with them and deal with them justly; surely Allah loves the doers of justice. Allah only forbids you respecting those who made war upon you on account of [your] religion, and drove you forth from your homes and backed up [others] in your expulsion, that you make friends with them, and whoever makes friends with them, these are the unjust.

The word "birr" is the same word used to describe a Muslim's relationship with their parents which is considered the most sacred blood relationship in Islam. Therefore, Muslims are clearly commanded to deal with peaceful non-Muslims in a friendly and peaceful manner. **The third point** is that the specific groups being referred to in this verse were those **hostile to Islam**, and not all Jews and Christians in general. Concerning the historical context, the verse was revealed during a time when the Muslims were being attacked from many directions, including the Christian Roman empire and the Jews of Madinah. The Muslims had originally made a pact with the Jews of Madinah, but they were betrayed twice. So in this context, the Qur'an was telling the believers to be cautious in dealings with such enemies who oppose Islam, and not to trust them as protectors. As Jasser Auda writes:

It was revealed in certain historic circumstances, in which there was a war between the infant Islamic state on different occasions on four different fronts: the Romans, the Persians, the pagans of Arabia, and the Jews of Madinah. So, the historic context of the revelation of this verse is a situation of war between Muslims and the People of the Book (Jews, internally in Madinah, and Christians, through a Roman crusade). So, yes, Muslims were not allowed to make friends with the enemies who were fighting them and wishing to eliminate them from the face of the earth. Some Muslims say that since the verse has this historic context, then it is part of history and no longer applies. This is not correct! It is true that the verse has a history behind it, but this does not mean that it is no longer relevant. It is totally relevant but **only** in a **context similar** to the historic context. So today Muslims are not to make friends with Jews or Christians (or followers of any

other religion for that matter) if they try to kill Muslims, kick them out of their homes, etc. (SOURCE)

The Qur'anic verse is relevant in a **similar context** to the historical context. A Muslim cannot take Jews or Christians or anyone as protectors if they oppose their religion and its teachings. The Muslims are encouraged to rely on each other for support. Dr. Muzammil Siddiqi writes:

It is obvious that Jews patronize the Jews and Christians patronize the Christians, so why not Muslims patronize Muslims and support their own people. This verse is not telling us to be against Jews or Christians, but it is telling us that we should take care of our own people and we must support each other. In his Tafsir, (Qur'an exegesis) Imam Ibn Kathir has mentioned that some scholars say that this verse (i.e. the one you referred to) was revealed after the Battle of Uhud when Muslims had a set back. At that time, a Muslim from Madinah said, "I am going to live with Jews so I shall be safe in case another attack comes on Madinah." And another person said, "I am going to live with Christians so I shall be safe in case another attack comes on Madinah." So Allah revealed this verse reminding the believers that they should not seek the protection from others, but should protect each other. (See Ibn Kathir, Al-Tafsir, vol. 2, p. 68) (SOURCE)[/

The groups prohibited for Muslims to take as protectors are described in the Qur'an:

The Holy Qur'an, 60:1 O ye who believe! Take not my enemies and yours as protectors,- offering them (your) love, even though they have rejected the Truth that has come to you, and have (on the contrary) driven out the Prophet and yourselves (from your homes), (simply) because ye believe in Allah your Lord! If ye have come out to strive in My Way and to seek My Good Pleasure, (take them not as friends), holding secret converse of love (and friendship) with them: for I know full well all that ye conceal and all that ye reveal. And any of you that does this has strayed from the Straight Path. 60:2 If they were to get the better of you, they would behave to you as enemies, and stretch forth their hands and their tongues against you for evil: and they desire that ye should reject the Truth.

So the Qur'an forbids taking those as protectors who expel the Muslims from their homes and who would betray and attack as soon as the opportunity arises. Those who have no respect for a Muslim's beliefs and desire that the Muslim leaves their faith - they cannot be taken as protectors. This is the correct interpretation based on the context of the verse. To conclude, we once again quote Dr. Muzammil Siddiqi:

Muslims are allowed to have non-Muslims as friends as long as they keep their own faith and commitment to Islam pure and strong. You are correct in pointing out that a Muslim man is also allowed to marry a Jewish or Christian

woman. It is obvious that one marries someone for love and friendship. If friendship between Muslims and Jews or Christians was forbidden, then why would Islam allow a Muslim man to marry a Jew or Christian woman? It is the duty of Muslims to patronize Muslims. They should not patronize any one who is against their faith or who fights their faith, even if they were their fathers and brothers. Allah says:

“O you who believe! Take not for protectors (Awliya') your fathers and your brothers if they love unbelief above faith. If any of you do so, they are indeed wrong-doers.” (Al-Tawbah : 23)

In a similar way, the Qur'an also tells Muslims that they should never patronize the non-Muslims against other Muslims. However, if some Muslims do wrong to some non-Muslims, it is Muslim's duty to help the non-Muslims and save them from oppression . The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said that he himself will defend a Dhimmi living among Muslims to whom injustice is done by Muslims. But Islam also teaches that Muslims should not seek the patronage of non-Muslims against other Muslims. They should try to solve their problems among themselves. (SOURCE)

Islam is a religion of peace and compassion, therefore it requires its adherents to act in the best possible manner to other human beings. Verse 5:51 does not refer to friends, but protectors, and the historical context reveals that this verse prohibits Muslims from seeking the protection and allegiance of those who are hostile to the Islamic faith. It is not a reference to all Non-Muslims, as the scholars of Islam have clarified.

Abrogated?

The next issue with this verse concerns abrogation. It has been claimed by some that this verse 9:5 has abrogated all the peaceful verses in the Qur'an. However, this claim results from a misunderstanding of some Qur'anic concepts. In the Qur'an there is *naskh* and there is also *takhsees*. Naskh is the abrogation of a ruling by a ruling that was revealed after it. Naskh occurs in matters of Islamic law. Takhsees on the other hand refers to specification, where one verse restricts the application of another verse, or specifies the limits not mentioned in the other verse. As Shaykh Abu Ammaar Yasir Qadhi writes:

Specification involves one verse limiting or restricting a general ruling found in another verse, whereas naskh involves abrogating the first verse *in toto* (i.e., it is not applied in any circumstances or conditions). (Qadhi, *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'aan*; UK Al-Hidaayah Publishing and Distribution, 1999, p. 233)