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Finding Moderate Interpretation of Verse 8:57 of Al-Qur'an

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Abstract

The existing interpretations of verse 8:57 of Al-Qur'an give punitive directives to deal with the captives if the Muslim fighters dominate the war over the unbelievers. However, many other Qur'anic verses as well as the teachings and actions of the Prophet (PBUH) direct the Muslims that the captives of war should be treated with lenience and honor, and fed them properly. This research aims to find a softer and more moderate version of the interpretation of this verse. The necessary resources required for this research have been taken mainly from the Qur'anic verses and hadiths of the Prophet (PBUH). The existing translations and interpretations (Tafsirs) of verse 8:57 have been studied and the comments of some renowned interpreters have been taken as the background resources for this research work. It has been understood that the "فَشَرُّدْ بِهِم" of this verse may be interpreted differently than as interpreted in the existing Tafsirs. Supporting Qur'anic verses, in this regard, have been identified, and the information from these verses has been taken into account as the resources for this research. The relevant information obtained from these verses has been adopted into the translation and interpretation of verse 8:57. This research gives a modified and moderate version of the interpretation of verse 8:57 of Al-Qur'an.

Keywords: Al-Qur'an, Prophet (PBUH), Verse, Captives, Interpretation, Disperse.

1. Introduction

Islam teaches us to be amiable to the entire creation of Allah (SWT), even towards the non-Muslims, unbelievers as well as those who oppose Islam. Islam only permits war in self-defense and to establish justice. One of the undesirable occurrences of war is that the captives (prisoners of war) are taken from the opponent forces. Islam directs us to treat the captives with lenience and honor.

However, some interpreters, in commenting on verse 8:57 of Al-Quran, refer to the punishment of captives so that other unbelievers, who have not participated in the war with believers, get warned or take lessons for not being involved in war with the Muslims in the future. These interpretations may convey wrong messages either to radical Islamic groups or to the non-Muslims. The interpreters have not mentioned any supporting verse of Al-Qur'an as well as any saying or action of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in support of these interpretations.

Regarding dealing with captives, Allah (SWT) gives us clear directives in the following verses:

فَإِذَا لَقِيتُمْ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَضَرْبِ الرِّقَابِ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا أَثَخَّنْتُمُوهُمْ فَشُدُّوا أَلْوَتَاقَ فَإِمَّا مَنًّا
بَعْدُ وَإِمَّا فِدَاءً حَتَّىٰ تَضَعَ الْحَرْبُ أَوْزَارَهَا ۗ ذَٰلِكَ وَلَوْ يَشَاءُ اللَّهُ لَآتَتْصَرَّ مِنْهُمْ وَلَكِن
لِّيَبْلُوَ بَعْضُكُمْ بِبَعْضٍ¹

“So when you meet those who disbelieve [in battle], strike [their] necks until, when you have inflicted slaughter upon them, then secure [their] bonds, and either [confer] favor afterwards or ransom [them] until the war lays down its burdens. That [is the command]. And if Allāh had willed, He could have taken vengeance upon them [Himself], but [He ordered armed struggle] to test some of you by means of others. And those who are killed in the cause of Allāh - never will He waste their deeds.”²

وَيُطْعَمُونَ أَلْطَعَامَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِ ۖ - مَسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا وَأَسِيرًا³

“And they give food in spite of love for it to the needy, the orphan, and the captive.”⁴

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قُلْ لِمَنْ فِي أَيْدِيكُمْ مِنَ الْأَمْسِرَىٰ إِن يَعْلَمِ اللَّهُ فِي قُلُوبِكُمْ خَيْرًا يُؤْتِكُمْ خَيْرًا
مِّمَّا أُخِذَ مِنْكُمْ وَيَغْفِرَ لَكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ⁵

¹ Al-Qur'an 47:4

² Sahih International, Translation of Verse 47:4 of Al-Quran, Quran.com

³ Al-Qur'an 76:8

⁴ Sahih International, Translation of Verse 76:8 of Al-Quran, Quran.com

⁵ Al-Qur'an 8:70

“O Prophet, say to whoever is in your hands of the captives, "If Allāh knows [any] good in your hearts, He will give you [something] better than what was taken from you, and He will forgive you; and Allāh is Forgiving and Merciful.”⁶

The mentioned verse (8:57) belongs to “Sura Al-Anfal” which was revealed after the Battle of Badr. The Muslims, during the period of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) lifetime, participated in about 80 encounters. There was no example of punishing the captives just because they were engaged in war against the Muslims.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) didn't allow punishing the captives at all. It has been narrated that when the Prophet (PBUH) was informed about his military commander Khalid Ibn al-Walid killed some captives from the tribe of Jadhimah, he said “O Allaah! I am free from what Khalid has done” (Bukhari Hadith 4339).⁷

Abu Musa Al-Ashari reported: The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said: “**Feed the hungry, visit the sick, and set the captives free.**”⁸

Therefore, the general directive of Islam towards captives (prisoners of war) is that they should be treated with lenience, and honor, fed and clothed properly, and set free if their freedom would not lead to further insecurity.

The objective of this research is to find a softer and more moderate version of the interpretation of verse 8:57 of Al-Qur'an. The meaning of bihim (بِهِمْ), the object of bi (بِ), and the object of sharrid (شَرِّدُ), in this verse have been taken into consideration as the key topics for this research. Supporting Qur'anic verses are identified and the information from these verses has been used as the resources for this research. The outcome of this research gives a modified version of interpretation of this verse, which is softer and more moderate than the existing interpretation. The research details are presented in this paper.

2. Review of Existing Interpretations

Allah (SWT) stated in verse 8:57 of Al-Qur'an:

فَأِمَّا تَنقَضَتْهُمْ فِي الْحَرْبِ فَشَرِّدْ بِهِمْ مَنْ خَلَفَهُمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَدَّكُرُونَ

⁶ Sahih International, Translation of Verse 8:70 of Al-Quran, Quran.com

⁷ Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith 4339, Sunnah.com

⁸ Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith 5649, Sunnah.com

“So if you, [O Muhammad], gain dominance over them in war, disperse by [means of] them those behind them that perhaps they will be reminded.”⁹

“If ye gain the mastery over them in war, disperse, with them, those who follow them, that they may remember.”¹⁰

“So if you gain the mastery over them in war, punish them severely in order to disperse those who are behind them, so that they may learn a lesson.”¹¹

2.1. Comments from Tafsir Ishraq al-Ma'ani

The textual word "sharrid" literally stands for dispersal. But, some of the earliest commentators have said that it means, "hand down an exemplary punishment."

Ibn Abbas, Qatadah, Sa'id ibn Jubayr, Hasan al-Busri and others have said that the Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to punish those he overpowered of his opponents - who broke their pledges every now and then - in an exemplary manner so as to discourage others who were watching the events and waiting for their own chance to strike at the Muslims.”¹²

2.2. Comments from Tafsir Ibn Kathir

فَإِمَّا تَنْفَقَهُمْ فِي الْحَرْبِ

“(So if you gain the mastery over them in war), if you defeat them and have victory over them in war,”

فَشَرِّدْ بِهِم مِّنْ خَلْفِهِمْ

“(then disperse those who are behind them,) by severely punishing the captured people according to Ibn `Abbas, Al-Hasan Al-Basri, Ad-Dahhak, As-Suddi, `Ata' Al-Khurasani and Ibn `Uyaynah. This Ayah commands punishing them harshly and inflicting casualties on them. This way, other enemies, Arabs and non-Arabs, will be afraid and take a lesson from their end.”¹³

2.3. Comments from Maariful Quran

“Here, the word: تَنْفَقَهُمْ (tathqafannahum) means to get the upper hand against them and the word: شَرِّدَ (sharrada) is a derivation from the infinitive noun: تَشْرِيدٌ (tashrid) which essentially means to drive out or scatter away.” So, the verse

⁹ Sahih International, Translation of Verse 8:57 of Al-Quran, Quran.com

¹⁰ Yusuf Ali, Translation of Verse 8:57 of Al-Quran, Quran.com

¹¹ Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali & Muhammad Muhsin Khan, Translation of Verse 8:57 of Al-12 Quran, Quran.com.

¹² Ishraq al-Ma'ani, Interpretation of Verse 8:57 of Al-Quran, <https://islamicstudies.info/quran/ishraq.php?sura=6&verse=56&to=60>.

¹³ Ibn Kathir, Interpretation of Verse 8:57 of Al-Quran, Quran.com

means: “If you overpower such people in a war, give them a drastic punishment which becomes an instant lesson for others - so that those who are busy bashing Islam behind the cover of such people serving as their agent provocateurs should understand clearly that there remains no alternative for them but to run for their lives. The drive of the instruction is that these people should be punished in a manner which makes an impression on the disbelievers of Makkah and other hostile tribes and sucks away any courage they may have to come back and confront Muslims in the future.”¹⁴

3. Analysis of Existing Interpretations (Comments)

Existing interpretations give severe and harsh directives, regarding the captives, that are summarized as:

1. “So if you gain the mastery over them in war, punish them severely in order to disperse those who are behind them;”¹¹
2. “The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to punish those he overpowered of his opponents;”¹²
3. (then disperse those who are behind them,) by severely punishing the captured people; This Ayah commands punishing them harshly and inflicting casualties on them);¹³
4. Give them a drastic punishment; Punishing of them becomes an instant lesson for others.¹⁴

The first part (conditional part) of the verse; “فَإِذَا تَنَفَقْتَهُمْ فِي الْحَرْبِ” is translated as:

“If you gain dominance over them in war;”¹⁰

“If you gain mastery over them in war;”¹¹

“If you defeat them and have victory over them in war;”¹³

All the translations above are almost similar in meaning summarized as:

“if you have the upper hand over the unbelievers in the war or if the war is under your control.”

The second part (action part) of the verse; “فَشَرِّدْ بِهِم مِّنْ خَلْفَهُمْ” is translated as:

“Disperse with/by (means of) them those who are behind them”

(Sahih International).

How to disperse those who are behind them? “By severely punishing the captured people,” is the general opinion of the renowned interpreters.

It is to be noted that:

¹⁴ Maariful Quran, Interpretation of Verse 8:57 of Al-Quran, Quran.com

- “Severely punishing the captured people” is not the translation of any word of this verse; rather added by the interpreters to make clear the meaning of the verse.
- Punishing the captured people is: unethical, against the teachings of Islam, against humanity, Human Rights, Geneva Convention, and the grave cause of creating anger and hatred among the unbelievers against the Muslims.
- Disperse others (by punishing captives) was an unrealistic task at that time. Because the disbelievers of Makkah and other hostile tribes were out of reach of the Muslim fighters. The unbelievers, within the reach of Muslims, and engaged in war, were just on the battlefield.
- Finding softer and more moderate interpretations may be justified, in this regard, and may have to require acceptance from Islamic scholars all over the world.

4. Finding Softer/Moderate Interpretation

It has been understood that the having concentration on the following topics would give a fruitful outcome for this research work:

- finding other meanings of bihim (بِهِمْ),
- finding the object of bi (بِ) other than captives,
- finding the object of sharrid (شَرِّدُ) other than mentioned in the existing Tafsirs,
- finding the translation and interpretation of the mentioned verse using modified objects of sharrid (شَرِّدُ) and bi (بِ).

After going through the existing translations and interpretations, we see that:

- bihim (بِهِمْ) is translated as: “with/by them,”
- the object of bi (بِ) is: “them (those who have been on the battlefield and then are defeated and captured),”
- the object of sharrid (شَرِّدُ) is: “those who are behind them or those who follow them.”

We may find other meanings of bihim (بِهِمْ) as well as the two objects, “object of bi (بِ) and object of sharrid (شَرِّدُ),” differently than as has been interpreted in the existing Tafsirs, taking into consideration of the examples of some other verses of Al-Qur’an.

4.1. Meaning of “Bihim (بِهِمْ)” in Qur’anic Verses Other than “with/by Them”

We know that “with/by them” is usually translated as the meaning of bihim (بِهِمْ). However, many verses in Al-Qur’an do not take “with/by them” as the meaning of bihim (بِهِمْ). The following verses are examples of taking the meanings of bihim (بِهِمْ) other than “with/by them.”

وَأَذْكُرُوا مَا فِيهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ¹⁵
 وَإِذْ نَتَقْنَا الْجَبَلَ فَوْقَهُمْ كَأَنَّهُ ظُلَّةٌ وَظَنُّوا أَنَّهُ وَاقِعٌ بِهِمْ خُذُوا مَا آتَيْنَاكُمْ بِقُوَّةٍ

“And [mention] when We raised the mountain above them as if it was a dark cloud and they were certain that it would fall **upon them**, [and Allah said], "Take what We have given you with determination and remember what is in it that you might fear Allah.”¹⁶

لَقَدْ تَابَ اللَّهُ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ وَالْمُهَاجِرِينَ وَالْأَنْصَارِ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُ فِي سَاعَةِ الْعُسْرَةِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا كَادَ يَزِيغُ قُلُوبَ فَرِيقٍ مِّنْهُمْ ثُمَّ تَابَ عَلَيْهِمْ إِنَّهُ بِهِمْ رَءُوفٌ رَّحِيمٌ¹⁷

“Allah has already forgiven the Prophet and the Muhājireen and the Anṣār who followed him in the hour of difficulty after the hearts of a party of them had almost inclined [to doubt], and then He forgave them. Indeed, He was **to them** Kind and Merciful.”¹⁸

وَلَمَّا جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا لُوطًا سِئَاءَ بِهِمْ وَضَاقَ بِهِمْ ذَرْعًا وَقَالَ هَذَا يَوْمٌ عَصِيبٌ¹⁹

“And when Our messengers, [the angels], came to Lot, he was anguished **for them** and felt **for them** great discomfort and said, This is a trying day.”²⁰

وَلَوْ رَحِمْنَاهُمْ وَكَشَفْنَا مَا بِهِمْ مِنْ ضُرٍّ لَلَجُّوا فِي طُغْيَانِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ²¹

“And even if We gave them mercy and removed what was **upon them** of affliction, they would persist in their transgression, wandering blindly.”²²

الزَّانِيَةُ وَالزَّانِي فَاجْلِدُوا كُلَّ وَاحِدٍ مِّنْهُمَا مِائَةَ جَلْدَةٍ وَلَا تَأْخُذْكُمْ بِهِمَا رَأْفَةٌ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَلَيْشَهَدَ عَدَايَهُمَا طَآئِفَةٌ مِّنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ²³

¹⁵ Al-Qur'an 7:171

¹⁶ Sahih International, Translation of Verse 7:171 of Al-Quran, Quran.com

¹⁷ Al-Qur'an 9:117

¹⁸ Sahih International, Translation of Verse 9:117 of Al-Quran, Quran.com

¹⁹ Al-Qur'an 11:77

²⁰ Sahih International, Translation of Verse 11:77 of Al-Quran, Quran.com

²¹ Al-Qur'an 23:75

²² Sahih International, Translation of Verse 23:75 of Al-Quran, Quran.com

²³ Al-Qur'an 24:2

“As for female and male fornicators, give each of them one hundred lashes, and do not let pity **for them** make you lenient in ‘enforcing’ the law of Allah, if you ‘truly’ believe in Allah and the Last Day. And let a number of believers witness their punishment.”²⁴

لَئِن لَّمْ يَنْتَهِ الْمُنَافِقُونَ وَالَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ وَالْمُرْجِفُونَ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ لَنُغْرِيَنَّكَ بِهِمْ ثُمَّ لَا يُجَاوِرُونَكَ فِيهَا إِلَّا قَلِيلًا²⁵

“If the hypocrites and those in whose hearts is disease and those who spread rumors in al-Madīnah do not cease, We will surely incite you **against them**; then they will not remain your neighbors therein except for a little.”²⁶

قَالُوا سُبْحٰنَكَ اَنْتَ وَلِيْنَا مِنْ دُوْنِهِمْ ؕ بَلْ كَانُوْا يَعْبُدُوْنَ اَلْجِنَّ ؕ اَكْثَرُهُمْ بِهِمْ مُّؤْمِنُوْنَ²⁷

“They will say, “Exalted are You! You, [O Allāh], are our benefactor excluding [i.e., not] them. Rather, they used to worship the jinn; most of them were believers **in them**.”²⁸

هٰذَا فَوْجٌ مُّقْتَحِمٌ مَّعَكُمْ ؕ لَا مَرْحَبًا بِهِمْ ؕ اِنَّهُمْ صَالُوْا النَّارَ²⁹

“[Its inhabitants will say], This is a company bursting in with you. No welcome **for them**. Indeed, they will burn in the Fire.”³⁰

وَاَنَّا لَا نَدْرِيْ اَسْرَأْرِيْدُ بِمَنْ فِي الْاَرْضِ اَمْ اَرَادَ بِهِمْ رَبُّهُمْ رَشَدًا³¹

“Now, we have no clue whether evil is intended for those on earth, or their Lord intends **for them** what is right.”³²

We have observed from the translations of the above verses that “bihim (بِهِمْ)” has been translated as: **in them; at them; to them; on/upon them; for them**, instead of **with/by them**.

4.2. Omitting Objects in Qur'anic Verses

Taking other meanings of “bihim (بِهِمْ)” into consideration, “فَشَرَّذُ بِهِمْ” would be translated as:

²⁴ Sahih International, Translation of Verse 24:2 of Al-Quran, Quran.com

²⁵ Al-Qur'an 33:60

²⁶ Sahih International, Translation of Verse 33:60 of Al-Quran, Quran.com

²⁷ Al-Qur'an 34:41

²⁸ Sahih International, Translation of Verse 34:41 of Al-Quran, Quran.com

²⁹ Al-Qur'an 38:59

³⁰ Sahih International, Translation of Verse 38:59 of Al-Quran, Quran.com

³¹ Al-Qur'an 72:10

³² Sahih International, Translation of Verse 72:10 of Al-Quran, Quran.com

“Then disperse in/at/to/on/upon them.”

The object of sharrid (شَرَّدَ) is apparently omitted here. But it would come from the first part of this verse, “So if you gain dominance over them in war.”

There are some verses of Al-Qur'an where the objects are omitted. Some examples are mentioned below:

أَمَّنْ هُوَ قَبِيتٌ ءَأَنَاءَ اللَّيْلِ سَاجِدًا وَقَائِمًا يَحْذَرُ الْآخِرَةَ وَيَرْجُو رَحْمَةَ رَبِّهِ ۗ قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الَّذِينَ يَعْلَمُونَ وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ۗ إِنَّمَا يَتَذَكَّرُ أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ ۗ³³

“Is one who is devoutly obedient during periods of the night, prostrating and standing [in prayer], fearing the Hereafter and hoping for the mercy of his Lord, [like one who does not]? Say, “Are those who **know** equal to those who **do not know**?” Only they will remember [who are] people of understanding.”³⁴

We see two forms of the same verb here is يَعْلَمُونَ and لَا يَعْلَمُونَ. The verb عَلِمَ means “to know”, and it should have an object. However, Allah (SWT) has not mentioned any object for يَعْلَمُونَ in this verse. The intention of Allah (SWT) here is not to talk about what a person knows, and what he doesn't know. Allah (SWT) may intend to say that the people who have knowledge of Islam are not equal to the people who have no knowledge of Islam.

وَاللَّهُ يَدْعُو إِلَى دَارِ السَّلَامِ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ.³⁵

“And Allah **invites** to the Home of Peace and guides whom He wills to a straight path.”³⁶

Allah (SWT) has not said in this verse that “He calls Muslims/Arabs.” By omitting the object, Allah (SWT) has left the verb open and general. Then, actually, whom does Allah invite? Muslims; Arabs or Mankind in general.

لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ جَعَلْنَا مَنْسَكًا هُمْ نَاسِكُوهُ ۗ فَلَا يُنْزِعُ عَنْكَ فِي الْأَمْرِ ۖ وَأَدْعُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ ۗ إِنَّكَ لَعَلىٰ هُدًى مُسْتَقِيمٍ.³⁷

³³ Al-Qur'an 39:9

³⁴ Sahih International, Translation of Verse 39:9 of Al-Quran, Quran.com

³⁵ Al-Qur'an 10:25

³⁶ Sahih International, Translation of Verse 10:25 of Al-Quran, Quran.com

³⁷ Al-Qur'an 22:67

“For every religion We have appointed rites which they perform. So, [O Muhammad], let the disbelievers not contend with you over the matter but **invite them** to your Lord. Indeed, you are upon straight guidance.”³⁸

We see no object of “وَأَدْعُ” in the Arabic text of this verse. Then whom the Prophet (PBUH) was instructed to invite? But the translation mentioned the object as described below:

وَأَدْعُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ

“but **invite them** to your Lord;”

Here “**them (disbelievers)**” is omitted in the original verse but included in the translations to make the meaning of the verse clear.

4.3. Finding Object of Sharrid (شَرِّدُ) and Object of Bi (بِ)

We may adopt the principle of the above examples in verse 8:57 of Al-Qur’an. It is already discussed by the examples of some other verses that “بِهِمْ” may also be translated as: in them; at them; to them; on/upon them; for them; instead of with/by them. Taking “in/to them” (as the meaning of “بِهِمْ”) into consideration,

فَشَرِّدْ بِهِمْ would be translated as:

“Then disperse (**something**) in/to them.”

What is to be dispersed *in/to* them? The answer in this case is the object of sharrid (شَرِّدُ). The direct object of sharrid (شَرِّدُ) would be:

“The information of the war (consequences of the war): that the Muslims have gained dominance over them in war; that the unbelievers have been defeated.”

The object of bi (بِ) is:

“To whom the information of the war is to be dispersed in/to?” The answer here would be: “them (those who follow them).”

5. Results: Modified Translation and Interpretation of Verse 8:57

The findings of this research have been summarized as follows:

- the meaning of bihim (بِهِمْ) would be, “in them or to them;”
- the object of sharrid (شَرِّدُ) would be “information of the war (consequences of the war);” and
- the object of bi (بِ) would be “them (not the captives of war but those who follow them, i.e., the disbelievers of Makkah and other hostile tribes).”

These findings have been adopted into the translation and interpretation of the verse 8:57 of Al-Quran. Now we have modified version of translation and interpretation of this verse.

³⁸ Sahih International, Translation of Verse 22:67 of Al-Quran, Quran.com

5.1. Modified Version of Translation of Verse 8:57

فَإِمَّا تَنْفَقَهُمْ فِي الْحَرْبِ فَشَرِّدْ بِهِمْ مَن خَلْفَهُمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَدْكُرُونَ

“So, if you gain dominance over them in war, then disperse (the information of the war) in/to them those who follow them that they may remember.”

5.2. Moderate Version of Interpretation of Verse 8:57

فَإِمَّا تَنْفَقَهُمْ فِي الْحَرْبِ

“So, if you gain dominance over them in war (if you gain mastery over them in war; if you defeat them in war; if you win the war; if the war is under your control),

فَشَرِّدْ بِهِمْ مَن خَلْفَهُمْ

“then disperse (the information of the war; consequences of the war) in/to them (disbelievers of Makkah and other hostile tribes) those who follow them (who are behind them),”

لَعَلَّهُمْ يَدْكُرُونَ

“that they may remember (take lessons not to come back and confront Muslims in the future).”

6. Discussions

It may not be justified for us to keep the concept that Allah (SWT) would instruct the Prophet (PBUH) to severely punish the captives of war. Because, then it goes against the directives of many other verses of Al-Quran. Rather, Allah (SWT) may instruct the Prophet (PBUH) to disperse the information about the war in/to those who follow them (disbelievers of Makkah and other hostile tribes), to take lessons; according to the modified interpretation presented here.

Then Allah (SWT) even discourages His Messenger (PBUH) of having captives until there are genuine and serious battles:

مَا كَانَ لِنَبِيِّ أَنْ يُكُونَ لَهُ أَسْرَىٰ حَتَّىٰ يُثْجِنَ فِي الْأَرْضِ ۚ تُرِيدُونَ عَرَصَ الدُّنْيَا وَاللَّهُ يُرِيدُ
الْآخِرَةَ وَاللَّهُ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ³⁹

“It is not for a prophet to have captives until he battles strenuously in the land. Some desire the commodities of this world, but Allah desires for you the Hereafter, for Allah is Almighty and Wise.”⁴⁰

The directives of existing interpretations may apply to a particular group of unbelievers who broke their pledges every time, conspired with others, and were involved in evil-doings against the Muslims. They claimed to be at peace with

³⁹ Al-Qur'an 8:67

⁴⁰ Sahih International, Translation of Verse 8:67 of Al-Quran, Quran.com

Muslims while, on the other hand, they used to conspire with the disbelievers of Makkah against Muslims. This group of unbelievers have been mentioned in the following verse:

الَّذِينَ عَاهَدْتَ مِنْهُمْ ثُمَّ يَنْقُضُونَ عَاهِدَهُمْ فِي كُلِّ مَرَّةٍ وَهُمْ لَا يَتَّقُونَ⁴¹

“The ones with whom you made a treaty but then they break their pledge every time, and they do not fear Allah.”⁴²

However, these directives cannot be taken as the general principles for Muslims regarding dealing with captives. We could see how the Prophet (PBUH) commanded good treatment of captives on the day of Badr. “Omar (RA) suggested that a few of these prisoners were dangerous criminals who should be executed as a matter of justice. The Prophet (PBUH) preferred the opinion of Abu Bakr (RA) which favored pardon and mercy” (Mislim Hadith 1763), indicating that this is the general rule in Islam.⁴³

Therefore, the modified and moderate version of the interpretation of verse 8:57 of Al-Qur'an presented in this paper may deserve acceptance generally from the Muslim community and especially from Islamic scholars.

7. Conclusion

The captives of war must be treated with kindness, must be fed generously, must not be forced to beg for their subsistence, and must be clothed properly, according to the Islamic values, based upon Islamic teachings, in both the Qur'an and hadith. The early followers of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also considered it a principle to not separate prisoners from their relatives. After the fighting is over, captives are to be released freely, with ransom, with some prospect of survival, or to be exchanged with Muslim prisoners. However, the existing interpretations of the mentioned verse do not go with the proper teachings and practices of Islam.

The research work presented in this paper gives a modified, softer, and more moderate version of the translation and interpretation of verse 8:57 of Al-Qur'an, that does not go against the general practices of Islam, regarding dealing with the captives (prisoners of war). Islamic scholars may evaluate this research work by their profound knowledge and judgment. It is to be noted that, we can put our efforts into understanding and interpreting the message of Allah (SWT) just by our available knowledge. We may or may not be correct or successful in finding the perfect outcomes of our efforts. The outcome of this research work may demonstrate the decency of the religion of Islam not only to the Muslim community but also to the non-Muslims as well.

⁴¹ Al-Qur'an 8:56

⁴² Sahih International, Translation of Verse 8:56 of Al-Quran, Quran.com

⁴³ Sahih Muslim, Hadith 1763, Sunnah.com