

The Commandments and Prohibitions Rules of Interpretation in Quranic Exegesis

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ABSTRACT--- *This study seeks to examine the interpretation rules as proposed by M. Quraish Shihab (b. 1944) which centres on the debates of commandments (al-amr) and prohibitions (al-nahy). Shihab in his Quranic work, Tafsir Al-Mishbah had proposed a number of rules that had motivated him towards exegeting the verses. Respected exegetes have also adopted this particular rule to make sure their interpretation are consistent with the Islamic law. Hence, this study has followed the document analysis method by making language scriptures and acclaimed exegeses as the main sources of reference in order to get a proper conclusion, and to make sure the rules that Shihab had used can be examined perfectly. The study established that Shihab had employed some rules associated to al-amr and al-nahy in his methodology, and the rules have been confirmed and also consistent by both scholars and exegetes.*

Keywords--- *M. Quraish Shihab, Commandments, Rules of Interpretation, Quranic Exegesis, Prohibitions, Tafsir al-Mishbah.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The development of the interpretation's rules was undertaken by many scholars since the rise of the Qur'anic sciences; actually even the formation of several religious disciplines has been reinforced by the inspiration to understand the Qur'anic verses. Burhān al-Dīn al-Zarkashī (1344-1392) who wrote *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (1445-1505) with his work *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* were two past scholars who have discussed the rules of interpretation. Nevertheless, this subject has been studied long before the two scholars did.

Tāqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taimiyah (1263-1328) who wrote *Muqaddimah Uṣūl al-Tafsīr* is considered as the pioneer of rules of interpretation. Another pioneering scholar was Muḥammad ibn Sulaimān al-Kāfiyājī (d. 879) who produced the book of *al-Taisīr fī Qawā'id 'Ilm al-Tafsīr* (Shihab, 2011). The writing on this subject has since multiplied with the introduction of several works which include the introduction of *Maḥāsīn al-Ta'wīl* by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (1866-1914), *al-Qawā'id al-Hisān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by 'Abd al-Raḥman Nāṣir al-Sa'dī (1889-1956), *Uṣūl al-Tafsīr wa Qawā'iduhu* by Khālīd 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-'Āk, *Qawā'id al-Tarjīḥ 'Inda al-Mufasssīrīn* by Ḥusain al-Ḥarabī, *Qawā'id al-Tafsīr Jam'an wa Dirāsah* by Khālīd al-Sabt, and *Mabāḥith Fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* by Mannā' al-Qaṭṭān (1925-1999).

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Some scholars have differences in their attitudes and views on the interpretation's rules. Some of them, only considered the rule as a guideline for any interpretation. However, some others considered the rule as binding and must be applied by other interpretations. In this case, there is another view that considers exegesis as an endeavour that keeps changing, at par with social, knowledge, language development and so on, therefore the rules of interpretation can be considered as a work guideline. As far as this is concerned, the rule does not force other exegetes to use the same guideline where all exegetes have the right to use different guidelines by leaning on methodological framework assigned.

Other than that, the rules are not found to be similar in concept that have been laid out by the scholars above. For example, al-Sa'dī (1999) was inclined to expand the rule in general, through some religious understanding such as theology and the Islamic law. Meanwhile, al-Qaṭṭān (1992), al-Suyūṭī (1996), and al-Sabt (2001) have elaborated on this further. In other words, the rules of interpretation are very important as a guideline to exegetes so that the exegeses produced are objective, academic and can be held accountable. Hence, in this vein, this decent article focuses on the study on the rules of interpretation employed by Shihab in his exegetical work, *Tafsir Al-Mishbah* that relates with the commandments (*al-amr*) and prohibitions (*al-nahy*) in science of Arabic rhetoric.

II. THE RULES OF INTERPRETATION: MEANINGS AND FUNCTIONS

In Arabic language, rules of interpretation is a combination of two words namely *qawā'id* 'rules' and *al-tafsīr* 'exegesis'. *Qawā'id* in the language viewpoint is defined as the foundation (al-Azharī 1964, 1: 202; Ibn Manzūr 1996, 3: 357). It is also defined as pillars for everything above it (al-Kafawī, 1998: 1110), and as foundation or pillars analogous to a building, or carry the meaning of something that is thorough in nature that encompasses every part (Muṣṭafā, et al., 1960, 2: 748). The rule means a general summary that encompasses the whole parts in terminological basis (al-Fayūmī 1990: 195). On the other hand, al-Sabt (2001) defined it as a general stipulation by which provisions associated with the details were known.

The definition of *al-tafsīr* from the aspect of language, according to 'Abd ar-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad al-Jurjānī (400-471 AH), and Muḥammad al-Fairūzabādī (1329-1414), is explaining something and making it clearer and more distinct, or uncovers something hidden (al-Fairūzabādī, 1886: 587; al-Jurjānī 1985, 1: 87). From here, However, al-Zarkashī (1998) in terms of terminology, defined it as a set of knowledge employed to have the best understanding of the Qur'an which was revealed to the Prophet (pbuh), clarifying its meaning, extracting rulings of Islamic law and wisdoms contained in it with the aid of linguistics, Arabic grammar, principles of jurisprudence, reasons of the revelation, and the abrogation and abrogated.

Hence, it can be concluded that the rule of interpretation or *qawā'id al-tafsīr* is a set of ruling which is universal in nature, applied by exegetes as a guideline to reach to the study of the meanings of the Qur'an and knowing the procedures to get its wisdoms.

III. THE NOTION OF COMMANDMENTS (AL-AMR) AND PROHIBITIONS (AL-NAHY) IN QUR'ANIC RHETORIC

According to al-Jārim & Amīn (n.d.) the science of rhetoric describes a great, clear meaning which can exert such a beautiful influence in the soul, and its every verse relevant with the context and also suitable to be used for the addressees. Thus, the Qur'anic rhetoric can deliver some noble values to mankind and are appropriate with the place and situation, so much so that their wit and conscience succumb to the values. It discusses three important sciences, and they are *al-Ma'ānī*, *al-Badī'* and *al-Bayān*. However, for a better explanation, this article discusses on the science of *al-Ma'ānī* which focus on *al-amr* and *al-nahy* both of which are included in the substantial discussion in *al-Ma'ānī*. In this context, elaboration on *al-amr* and *al-nahy* will be made, and then the level of validity of the interpretative rule used is analysed, one which relates with both the terms in *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*.

The science of *al-Ma'ānī* examines the state of the utterance or word in terms of the suitability with the purpose intended (Ḥusain 1977: 17). It is based on the policies and the rules of utterances conveyed according to the suitability to the public as the recipients. The purpose is to avoid committing errors of meaning the way it is intended to be delivered by the addresser until it becomes understandable to the addressee (al-Hashīmī 1960: 46). In brief, *al-Ma'ānī* means knowledge which discusses the position of the utterance that is in line with a given situation.

One of the important debates in this science is *al-amr* and *al-nahy*. *al-Amr* means order to others to commit an act by speech that implies obligatory meaning (Yūsuf al-Juwaynī, nd.: 13), while *al-nahy* means an order to others to leave an act with a speech that contains obligatory meaning (al-Kafawī, 1998: 258). It also means actions were ordered by superiors to subordinates (Ibn Quddāmah, 1979: 189). Thus, it can be concluded that the meaning of *al-amr* wa *al-nahy* is a claim that implies obliged to do or leave something from a higher party.

IV. AN APPLICATION OF AL-AMR AND AL-NAHY RULES IN SHIHAB'S EXEGESIS

In lieu of this, some scholars have been in unison on the rules of interpretation which relate with *al-amr* and *al-nahy*, as to ensure that one's exegeses does not deviate. Shihab, as one of the exegetes in the Archipelago also applied both rules in his *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, such as:

1) Rule: The Command to Do Something Means to Prohibit Otherwise

This rule means that when Allah instructs to do an act, it means prohibiting something that is otherwise. If He forbids doing an act, it is at the same time ordering something otherwise (al-Ba'ī, 1956: 183; al-Sa'dī, 1999: 85; al-Sabt, 2001/2: 482; Ibn al-Najjār, 1997/3: 56; Ibn Taimiyyah, 2005/7: 173). For example, Shihab applies this rule when interpreting *surah al-Rūm* verse 30, "*fa aqim wajhaka li al-dīn ḥanīfan*" which means "So direct your face toward the religion, inclining to truth...".

Shihab (2010/10: 207) states that what is meant by the phrase "*fa aqim wajhaka*" is the order to uphold and increase the effort to worship Allah perfectly, because the Muslims of this time, especially the Prophet

Muhammad has set his face to the demands of His religion. From this command, it is also implied to ignore the disorder of the idolaters when this verse was revealed in Mecca. The implied meaning is understood from the text of the verse above which orders to direct the face. In conclusion, someone who was ordered to face a particular direction which in essence means he was asked not to turn to the left and right, notwithstanding what happens behind the direction, that should be his goals.

Based on Shihab's interpretation, it is understood that the meaning of "*fa aqim wajhaka*" is a command to maintain and improve all efforts in worshipping Allah perfectly. It also contains the meaning of the prohibition, which is the command to ignore the various disorders of the idolaters at that time. In this case, someone who is ordered to direct his face in one direction, in fact asked to always focus and not turn his face to the left or to the right, or to look back. In other words, a command to do something means barring the opposite actions.

2) Rule: The Command Absolutely Contains Compulsory Meaning Unless There is an Indicator (*Qarīnah*) Which States Otherwise

In Arabic, this rule is stated as "*al-amr al-muṭlaq yaqtaḍī al-wujūb illā li ṣārīf*" (al-Sabt, 2001/2: 479). This rule means an order referring to the obligatory (*wājib*) meaning either absolutely or due to the existence of an indicator. When it has an indicator, it can mean obligatory, encouraged (*sunat*), or others which depends on its indicator ('Abd al-Qawī, 1987/2: 365). If the order is specified in absolute term, then it means obligatory (al-Jawziyyah, 1996: 810).

For example, Shihab applies this rule when interpreting *surah al-Aḥzāb* verse 53. In this verse the phrase "*fantashirū*" which means "disperse" is a mandatory order, attending the invitation is encourage, asking permission is obligatory, and lingering in idle talk is prohibited. Therefore, this command is a mandatory order (Shihab, 2010/10: 524). [See also Shihab's interpretation which applied this rule in *surah al-Māidah* verse 1, and *al-Nūr* verse 56]. This interpretation is also stated by 'Āshūr (1984/22: 85), and al-Biqā'ī (1992/15: 392), due to the word "*nāzirīn*" in the verse which is in the form of active participle (*ism al-fā'il*) which contains very strict intentions in the prohibition "*ablagh fī al-nahy*".

The existence of an indicator on the redaction of the verse take out the obligatory meaning from the commandment, for example, this can be seen through Shihab's interpretation in *sura al-Tawbah* verse 5:

"And when the sacred months have passed, then kill the polytheists wherever you find them and capture them and besiege them and sit in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they should repent, establish prayer, and give zakah, let them [go] on their way. Indeed, Allah is Forgiving and Merciful."

Shihab (2010, 5: 19) states that the order to kill in this verse is not mandatory, but it means the consent to kill. Similarly, the order to arrest the enemy. The option is tailored to the attitudes and behaviour of each of the idolaters. The greater the harm that can be caused, the greater the punishment given. [See also Shihab's interpretation in *surah al-Baqarah* verse 282, and *al-Māidah* verse 87 which indicate the existence of indicator on the verse which causes the commandment but does not contain the obligatory meaning].

Based on this interpretation, it is understood that the order of killing, and arresting the polytheists in *surah al-Tawbah* verse 5 is not a compulsory order, but it means consent. This meaning is derived based on the indicator which shows the large and small form of punishment imposed according to the attitude and behaviour of the

idolaters. The greater the danger they can cause, the greater the form of punishment to be imposed (‘Āshūr, 1983/10: 115).

3) Rule: Order to the Group Implies a Duty on Every Member in the Group Unless There is Proof to the Contrary

This rule is stated by al-Sabt (2001/2: 493) with “*al-amr li jamā’ah yaqtaḍī wujūbih ‘alā kulli wāḥid minhum illā li dalīl*”. This method means the order to the group contains the mandatory meaning of each member in the group (‘Abd al-Qawī, 1987/2: 403). The obligation is not cancelled even though there is one who has performed it, unless there is an argument or evidence that indicates the opposite, or with words that refer to the meaning of the communal duties of *farḍu kifāyah* (Ibn Quddāmah, 1979: 207), as Allah’s word in sura *Āli ‘Imrān* verse 104.

From this point, Shihab applied this rule when interpreting *surah al-Baqarah* verse 282 which means “*O you who have believed, when you contract a debt for a specified term, write it down.*” Shihab (2010/1: 731) states that the text of this verse shows order to the believers, but which is meant to carry out transactions of debt, even more specifically those who are in debt. It aims to give the debtors the calmness by putting the transaction in writing as an evidence, because the order for writing is a highly recommended guide, even though the debtor does not ask for it.

Hence, based on the interpretation of Shihab, it is understandable that the order to write debt contract is directed to the group, i.e., believers. However, the writing order contains the meaning of the obligation for every believer in the group, or the person who in conducting the debts transaction, even more specifically the person who owes it. With the written evidence, it can give calm to the debtor, although he doesn’t need it.

4) Rule: The Order and Prohibition in the Form of Information Are More Powerful Than the Strictly Stated

In Arabic, this rule is stated as “*ikhbār fī ma’nā al-nahy wa huwa ablagh min ṣarīḥ al-amr wa al-nahy*” (Abū al-Sa’ūd, 1994/1: 204; al-Zamakhsharī, 1998/1: 290). This rule means the form of news that contains the meaning of the prohibition more strongly of its emphasis than the order or prohibition which is directly stated.

An example to this rule is Shihab’s interpretation in *sura al-Baqarah* verse 83 which means “*And [recall] when We took the covenant from the Children of Israel, [enjoining upon them], do not worship except Allah, and to parents do good ...*” Shihab (2010/1: 299) stated that the phrase “*la ta’budūn illā Allah*” means “*You do not worship other than Allah*”, while some scholars translated it with “*jangan kamu menyembah selain Allah*” or “*do not worship except Allah*”. This translation does not match to the verse text, although in accordance with qirā’at, i.e. “*lā ta’budū illā Allah*”. From this perspective, the translation of Shihab contains a deeper emphasis, as a prohibition in the form of information is more powerful than its emphasis on the form of a ban. Prohibition in the form of information indicates that it has been implemented, whereas expressly stated in the form of an order that may not be executed. [See also Shihab’s interpretation which applied this rule in *sura al-Nūr* verse 3].

Based on this interpretation, it is understandable that the phrase “*la ta’budūn illā Allah*” where according to Shihab must be understood with the meaning of the information, that is “*you do not worship other than Allah*”. While understanding it with the strict meaning of the prohibition “*do not worship except Allah*” is not in accordance with the text of the verse, although still in accordance with the qirā’at of the verse, that is “*lā ta’budū illā Allah*”. Since the prohibition in the form of information is stronger than its emphasis on strictly in the form

of a ban, the argument is the prohibition in the form of information shows that it has been implemented, whereas the use of a restriction can also be understood either it had been implemented or not.

Shihab reinforces the use of the above rule when interpreting *sura al-Baqarah* verse 228 which means “*Divorced women remain in waiting for three periods...*” According to Shihab (2010/1: 593), the command that uses the form of information is one of the Qur’anic styles in emphasizing an order to something. It is considered to be more powerful than the verse that uses the command form explicitly. This is because the verse that applies the command form strictly does not necessarily indicate the execution of the asserted commands the person may refuse to follow it. In addition, the form of information that uses verbs that consist of continuous meaning, shows what has been reported has been well-executed and persistent from time to time. Furthermore, the strength of the command using information form is derived from a statement which indicates that “every news can contain truth or error”. *Sura al-Baqarah* verse 228 shows that Allah has ordered the woman who has been divorced to wait for several months. If a divorced woman does not follow it, it means that what is being told by God is not true. At the same time, they have judged Allah has lied about His information. Thus, the above verse instructs wives divorced by their husbands to prove the truth of the information of Allah by waiting for several months. In other words, this power is contained in a command that uses information form.

5) Rule: When There is a Mandatory Order Which is Followed by a Subsequent Order, Then the Second Order is Permissible (Mubāh)

Shihab applied this rule when interpreting *sura al-Jumu‘ah* verses 9 and 10 which means:

“O you who have believed, when [the adhan] is called for the prayer on the day of Jumu'ah [Friday], then proceed to the remembrance of Allah and leave trade. That is better for you, if you only knew.

And when the prayer has been concluded, disperse within the land and seek from the bounty of Allah, and remember Allah often that you may succeed.”

Shihab (2010/14: 61) states that the order to scatter on earth and seek some of His gifts in the above verse is not mandatory order. To reinforce this interpretation, Shihab points out the view of the scholars who stated that “when there is a mandatory order, followed by a subsequent order, it means the second order is permitted to be done”. Verse 9 instructs believers to attend Friday prayer, this order is obligatory. Therefore, the order to disperse in the next verse is not obligatory. [See also Shihab’s interpretation which applied this rule in *sura al-Talaq* verse 2].

Based on the interpretation of Shihab, it is understandable that the phrase “*fantashirū*” or “*to disperse*” means the order to scatter on the earth and seek some of the gifts of Allah after performing the Friday prayer, is the permissible order (al-Qurṭubī, 1964/18: 108). Therefore, in *sura al-Jumu‘ah* verse 9, Allah ordered the believers to perform the Friday prayer and prohibit to continuing business activities after the *adhān* (Ibn Kathīr, 2000/8: 122). In other words, the order contained in verse 9 is mandatory, whereas the order referred to verse 10 is permissible.

The author did not find any scholars who stated the rule mentioned by Shihab above. However, there is a rule of *Usul Fiqh* which is similar to the rule as stated by Shihab. The rule in question is “*al-amr al-wārid ba‘da al-hazr fī al-shar‘ annahu yufid al-ibāḥah*” (al-Zarkashī, 2000/2: 112; Ibn Quddāmāh, 1979: 198). This rule means that the order after ‘prohibition’ is permissible order. In this case, there is a ban on continuing business activities

after the *adhān* was announced, as Ibn Kathīr stated when interpreting verse 9 of this *sura*. Therefore, the commandment in verse 10 to scatter on the earth to seek His provision is a permissible order.

6) Rule: Prohibition is Prompt and Persistent Unless There is an Indicator Stating Otherwise

This rule is stated by al-Sabt (2001/2: 509) with “*al-nahy yaqtaḍī al-tahrīm wa al-fawr wa al-dawām illā li qarīnah*”. This rule means every prohibition in the Quran contains the meaning of forbidden (*ḥarām*), immediately and continuously, unless there is an indicator indicating otherwise.

Shihab applied this rule when interpreting *sura Luqman* verse 13 which means “*And [mention, O Muhammad], when Luqman said to his son while he was instructing him, “O my son, do not associate [anything] with Allah. Indeed, association [with him] is great injustice.”*” Shihab (2010/10: 298) stated that Luqman started his advice by emphasizing the need to avoid shirk or polytheism. This prohibition thus contains the teaching of His existence and oneness. The redaction used by this verse is in the form of prohibition to emphasize the need to leave something bad before doing good.

Based on Shihab’s interpretation above, it is understandable that verse 13 of *sura Luqman* which is in the form of prohibition that emphasizes the need to abandon something bad before performing good things. Therefore, Luqman’s advice to his son emphasizes the prohibition of polytheism and the need to leave this act immediately, thereby it contains teachings on the order to follow Him constantly.

V. CONCLUSION

Shihab is known as the greatest exegete in Indonesia who strongly emphasizes on the importance of understanding the meaning of the verse based on the linguistics analysis. By doing this, the meaning and true meaning required by the verses can be highlighted. This importance was realized by him by applying the rule of interpretation in his work *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*. In this regard, the study found six rules of *al-amr* and *al-nahy* used by him to ensure the interpretation produced in accordance with the requirements of Islamic teachings. Indeed, the study also concludes five rules used by Shihab are recognized and formulated by scholars and exegetes, while the sixth rule differentiate him with the other scholars.

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