

### Background and Meaning

Ibn Kathir identifies al-Kafirun as a Makkan surah. He presents it as a declaration of freedom from the worship practised by the polytheists and a command to worship sincerely. His commentary records an account of the opponents proposing an exchange in which each side would participate in the other's worship. The surah answers by setting out the separation between worship of Allah alone and worship involving partners. Its repeated declarations are central to that purpose and should be understood within the whole passage.

### Tafsir of the Surah

Ayah 1: The command to declare. The Prophet ﷺ is instructed to address the disbelievers. Ibn Kathir explains that the immediate audience was the disbelieving people of Quraysh, while the declaration expresses a general rejection of their form of worship. The wording makes the Prophet's position explicit. He is conveying what Allah commanded, rather than negotiating a shared religious practice.

Ayah 2-3: Who is worshipped. Ibn Kathir explains the objects of the opponents' worship as idols and rivals set alongside Allah. The Prophet ﷺ does not worship these. He worships Allah alone, without a partner. The next declaration concerns the opponents' failure to worship on that basis. The passage is therefore about the reality of devotion, rather than merely a difference in names used for the Divine.

Ayah 4-5: The manner of worship. Ibn Kathir also explains the declarations through the way worship is performed. The Messenger ﷺ and his followers worship Allah according to what He has prescribed. They do not adopt worship invented without His permission. This adds an important part of the explanation: sincere worship concerns both the One worshipped and following the revealed way of worshipping Him.

Ayah 2-5: The repeated declarations. Ibn Kathir records more than one explanation of the repetition. These include emphasis, the distinction between present and future commitment, and the rejection both of the act and of accepting such worship at all. These discussions make clear that the repetition strengthens the declaration. It does not create an opening for the proposed exchange of religious devotion.

Ayah 6: The concluding separation. Ibn Kathir explains the final statement as distinguishing the opponents' religion from Islam. He connects it with other Qur'anic passages declaring responsibility for one's own actions and freedom from the other party's worship. The conclusion should be read after the repeated rejection of shared worship in the preceding ayat. The whole surah affirms worship of Allah alone and commitment to the guidance brought by His Messenger ﷺ.



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ

١

Memorised

Say, "O disbelievers.

لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ

٢

Memorised

I do not worship what you worship.

وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عِبِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ

٣

Memorised

Nor do you worship what I worship.

وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَّا عَبَدْتُمْ

٤

Memorised

Nor do I serve what you serve.

وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عِبِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ

٥

Memorised

Nor do you serve what I serve.

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ

٦

Memorised

You have your way, and I have my way."

Parent tafsir: adapted from Ibn Kathir, Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim, 109:1-6.

Arabic commentary: [quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/katheer/sura109-aya1.html](http://quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/katheer/sura109-aya1.html)

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