And recall when We made a covenant with the Children of Israel: You shall serve none but Allah; and do good to parents, kinsmen, orphans and the needy; you speak kindly to, and establish Prayer and give Zakah (Purifying alms). And yet, except for a few of you, you turned back on this covenant, and you are still backsliders. (Al-Quran 2:83)

This verse speaks of the pledge which Allah had made with the Israelites, and the few people it refers to as having been true to the pledge; they were those who acted upon the Shariah (Law) of Prophet Musa or Moses (upon him be peace) as long as it was in force. And it then became part of the Shari’ah of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

**Injunctions and related considerations**

(1) This verse brings out the basic elements common to Islam and all the earlier Shari’ahs - Tawhid (the doctrine of Unity or Oneness of Allah); service to one’s parents, relations, orphans and the needy; being gentle in speaking to all human beings; Prayer and Zakah.

(2) The verse asks us to adopt a gentle tone and an open-hearted manner in speaking to others, whether they are good or evil, pious or impious, orthodox or aberrant, followers of Sunnah (sayings and deeds of the Prophet) or adherents to innovations in it. In religious matter, however, one should not try to hide the truth for the sake of pleasing people or of winning their approval. Al-Qur’an tells us that when Allah sent Prophets Musa and Harun (upon them be peace), to the Pharaoh, He instructed them to use gentle and soft words (Al-Qur’an 20:42). None of us who addresses another today can be superior to Prophet Musa (upon him be peace), nor can the man addressed be viler than the Pharaoh.

Talha ibn Umar recounts that once he said to the great master of the Sciences of Exegesis and Hadith, Ata, "One can see around you people who are not quite orthodox in their beliefs. As for me, I am rather short-tempered. If such people come to me, I deal with them harshly." Ata replied, "Do not behave like this," and, reciting the present verse, he added, "Allah has commanded us to speak to people politely. When Jews and Christians all are to be treated like this, would this commandment not apply to a Muslim, no matter what kind of a man he is?" (Imam Qurtubi)

Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him and do good to parents. If either of them or both reach old age, do not say to them 'uff (a word of anger or contempt) and do not scold them. And address them with respectful words, and submit yourself before them in humility out of compassion and say, "My Lord, be merciful to them as they have brought me up in my childhood." Your Lord knows best what is in your hearts. If you are righteous, then He is Most-Forgiving for those who turn to Him in repentance. (Al-Quran 17:23)

**Injunctions and related considerations**
Previous verses mentioned some conditions attached to the acceptance of deeds. One of the conditions required that no deed is accepted unless it comes with Iman (faith, belief) and is in accordance with Sharia and Sunnah. In the present verses, instructions regarding some of such deeds have been given. These are rules set by the Shari‘ah of Islam. Their compliance brings success in the Hereafter and their contravention, ruin. And since the most important of these conditions is that of Iman, therefore, the very first injunction given here was that of belief in the Tawhid. After that come injunctions relating to the rights of the servants of Allah (huquq al-‘ibad).

Imam Qurtubi says that, in the above verse Allah has made it necessary (wajib) to respect and treat parents well by combining it with the command to worship Him. This is similar to what has been said in Surah Luqman where the inevitable need to thank Him has been combined with the need to thank one’s parents, “Be grateful to Me, and to your parents” (Al-Qur’an 31:14). This proves that, after the obligation of worshipping the most exalted Allah, obeying parents is most important and being grateful to parents like being grateful to Allah is wajib (necessary). This has its confirmation in the Hadith of Sahih al-Bukhari. Here a person reportedly asked the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him): "Which is the most favoured deed in the sight of Allah?" He said, "Prayer at its (mustahabb: preferred) time." The person asked again, "Which is the most favoured deed after that?" To that he said, "Treating parents well." (Imam Qurtubi)

The merits of obeying and serving parents in Hadith

1. In the Musnad of Ahmad, Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah and Mustadrak Hakim, it has been reported on sound authority from Abu Darda that the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "A father is the main gate of Paradise. Now it is up to you to preserve or waste it." (Mazhari)

2. According to a report from Abdullah ibn Umar appearing in Jami’ al-Tirmidi and al-Mustadrak of al-Hakim (which Hakim rates as Sahih), the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "The pleasure of Allah is in the pleasure of a father and the displeasure of Allah in the displeasure of a father."

3. Ibn Majah reports on the authority of Abu Umamah that a person asked the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him): "What rights do parents have on their children?" He said, "They both are your Paradise, or Hell." It means that obeying and serving parents take one to Paradise and their disobedience and displeasure to Hell.

4. Al-Baihaqi (in Shu‘ab al-‘Iman) and Ibn Asakir have reported on the authority of Ibn Abbas that the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "For one who remained obedient to his parents for the sake of Allah two gates of Paradise shall remain open. And for one who disobeyed them two gates of Hell shall remain open, and if he had just one of the two, either father or mother, then, one gate (of Paradise or Hell shall remain open)." Thereupon, someone asked, "Does it (the warning of Hell) hold good even when the parents have been unjust to this person?" Then he said thrice: ‘yes, there is that warning of Hell against disobeying and hurting parents even if they were unjust to the son.’ (The outcome is that children have no right to settle scores with parents. If they have been unjust, it does not follow that they too back out from obeying and serving them).

5. Al-Baihaqi has reported on the authority of Abdullah ibn Abbas that the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "An obedient son who looks at his parents with mercy and affection receives
the reward of one accepted Hajj (pilgrimage) against every such look cast." People around said, "What if he were to look at them like that a hundred times during the day?" He said, "Yes, a hundred times too (he will keep receiving that reward). Allah is great (His treasures never run short)."

**The punishment for depriving parents of their rights comes - right here in this world too**

6. In *Shu'ab al-'Iman*, Al-Baihaqi has reported on the authority of Abu Bakrah that the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "As for all those other sins, Allah defers whichever He wills up to the Last Day of - except the sin of depriving parents of their rights and disobeying them. The punishment for that is given, much before comes the Hereafter, right here in this world as well. (All Hadith reports given here have been taken from *Tafsir Mazhari*)

**Obedience to parents: When necessary and when there is room for opposition**

Muslim scholars and jurists unanimously hold that the obedience to parents is *wajib* (necessary) only in what is permissible - and definitely not in what is impermissible or sinful. Says the *Hadith*:

> There is no obedience to the created in the disobedience of the Creator.

**To deserve service and good treatment it is not necessary that the parents be Muslims**

To support this ruling, Imam Qurtubi has quoted an event related with Sayyidah Asma, from the *Sahih of al-Bukhari*. According to this report, Sayyidah Asma asked the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), "My mother, is a Mushrik, comes to see me. Is it permissible for me to entertain her?" He said, "respect the bond of relationship with your mother and entertain her. And as for disbelieving parents, there is that statement of the Al-Qur'an itself (31:15): if the parents of a person are kafirs and order him too to become like them, then, it is not permissible to obey them in this matter. But, while living in this world, they should be treated in the recognized manner). It is obvious that 'recognized manner' means that they should be treated with courtesy.

**Rulings**

1. As long as *Jihad* does not become an absolute individual obligation (*Fard al-‘Ain*), rather remains within the degree of a collective obligation (*Fard al-Kifayah*), until then, it is not permissible for any son to participate in Jihad without the consent of parents. It has been reported in *Sahih al-Bukhari* on the authority of Abdullah ibn Umar that a person presented himself before the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) in order to have his permission to participate in Jihad. He asked him, "Are your parents alive?" He submitted, "Yes, they are." He said, Then you carry out Jihad in (the service oh them both). The sense is that 'by serving them alone you will get the reward of being in Jihad.' Another report also adds that the person said, "I have come here leaving my parents crying behind." Thereupon, he said, "Go. Make them laugh as you made them cry." In other words, he was to go back home and tell his parents that he would not be going for Jihad without their consent. (*Imam Qurtubi*)

2. From the event reported above, we learn the ruling that anything that rates as a collective obligation - and is not an individual obligation, or necessity - then, sons and daughters cannot
do that without the permission of parents. Also included here is the injunction to acquire the most perfect knowledge of religion at the highest level, and to travel to communicate and promote it. It means that anyone who has the knowledge of religion to the measure one is obligated with individually cannot travel in order to become a scholar of religion, or travel for the propagation of religion, for it is not permissible without the permission of parents.

3. Also included under the injunction of treating parents well appearing in the Al-Qur'an, and Hadith is good treatment with relatives and friends close to parents, especially when they are dead. In the Sahih of al-Bukhari, it has been reported from Abdullah ibn Umar that the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said,

The noblest regard one can show to a father after his death is to treat his friends well.

And Abu Usayd al-Badri reports that he was sitting with the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) when an Ansari came and asked, "O, Prophet, is it that some right of my parents remains due against me even after they have died?" He said,

Yes. Praying and seeking forgiveness for them, fulfilling the promises they had made to someone, being kind and respectful to their friends and showing mercy and generosity to such relatives who are linked in kinship only through them. These are the rights of your parents still due against you, even after them.

It was the blessed habit of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) that he used to send gifts to lady friends of Umm al-Mu'minin Khadijah after her demise which was a way of fulfilling the right of Khadijah on him.

Treating parents well: Special consideration in their old age

As for serving and obeying parents, as parents, it is not restricted to any given time or age. In fact, it is necessary (wajib) to treat parents well, under all conditions, and in every age. But, there are circumstances that usually impede the fulfilment of what is necessary and obligatory. Under these circumstances, the typical response pattern of the Holy Qur'an comes into action to suggest ways and means through which acting according to given injunctions becomes easy. With this objective in sight, it grooms and trains minds through different angles and, at the same time, it continues to emphasize that compliance of these injunctions is imperative despite such circumstances.

The old age of parents, when they become helpless, depend on children for everything they need and their life is at the mercy of children, is a terrible condition to be in. The slightest indifference shown by children at such a time breaks their heart. Then, there are those physical infirmities and diseases associated with old age which make one naturally irritation-prone. Furthermore, during the period of extreme old age, when usual reason and comprehension do not seem to be working, some of their wishes and demands assume the kind of proportions which children find difficult to take care of. The Holy Quran takes cognizance of these circumstances, but, while giving children the instruction to comfort them, it reminds them of their own childhood. It tells them that there was a time when they too were far more helpless, far too depending on their parents than their parents were on them at that point of time. Then, was it not that their parents sacrificed their desires and comforts for them and went on bearing by the unreasonable child talk with love and affection. Now when they have become so helpless,
reason and nobility demanded that the past favour done by them should be paid back. When it was said: “as they have brought me up in my childhood”, in the verse, this is what has been alluded to. Some other important instructions relating to the old age of parents have also been given in the verses under study. They are as follows:

1. Do not say even 'uff to them. Briefly explained parenthetically in the accompanying translation as 'a word of anger or contempt,' 'uff covers every word or expression that shows one’s displeasure. The limit is that breathing a long breath after having heard what they said and thereby betraying displeasure against them is also included under this very word 'uff' In a Hadith narrated by Caliph Ali, it has been reported that the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Had there been some other degree of hurting lesser than the saying of 'uff,' that too would have certainly been mentioned." (The sense is that even the thing that hurts parents in the lowest of the low degree is forbidden).

2. "Do not scold them": This is the second instruction. The word: (nahr) in the text: means 'scold' or 'reproach.' That it causes pain in already obvious.

3. "Address them with respectable words" - This is the third instruction. The first two instructions related to the negative aspects where bringing the least emotional pressure on parents have been prohibited. Given in this third instruction is a lesson in the art of conversation with parents - talk to them softly with love, grace and concern for them. Says the revered Tabi’i, Sa’id ibn Mussaiyyab, ' like a slave talking to his strict master!'

4. "Submit yourself before them in humility out of compassion" - This is the fourth instruction. The word: janah in the text literally means 'wings' or 'sides of arms' lending the sense that one should stand in a stance of submission and humility as a mark of respect for parents. The addition of the expression: out of compassion) at the end of the sentence is there to warn that this stance of grace should not be a mere show-off, instead, it should be adopted on the strong foundation of genuine, heart-felt respect and compassion for them. Perhaps, this may also be suggestive of something else as well - that showing humility before parents is practically no disgrace. In fact, it is a prelude to real honour for it is based on concern, compassion and kindness.

5. And say, "My Lord, be merciful to them" - . It means, as for the effort to provide maximum comfort for parents, it is humanly not possible. One should do whatever it is possible for him to do in order that they remain comfortable and, then, along with it, he should also keep praying before Allah that He, in His infinite mercy, removes all their difficulties and makes things easy on them. This last instruction is really so extensive and universal that it still continues to be valid and beneficial even after the death of parents. Through this, one can always keep serving parents.

Ruling

If parents are Muslims, making a prayer for mercy in their favour is obvious. But, if they are not Muslims, making this prayer within their lifetime will be permissible with the intention that they be delivered from worldly distress and that they be blessed with the taufiq of ‘Iman. After their death, making a prayer of mercy for them is not permissible. (Abridged from al-Qurtubi)

A remarkable event
Imam Qurtubi has reported from Jarir ibn 'Abdullah that a man came to the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) and complained that his father was taking away what belonged to him. He said, "Go and ask your father to come here." Right then, came Jibra'il and told the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) "When his father comes, ask him about the words he has composed in his heart and which his own ears have not heard yet." When this man returned with his father, he said to the father, "Why is it that your son complains against you? Do you wish to take away what belongs to him?" The father said, "You better ask him on whom do I spend other than his paternal or maternal aunts or myself" The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) had an expression which denoted that he had understood the reality and there was no need to say anything else. After that, he asked the father of the man, "What are those words that have not yet been heard by your own ears?" The father said, "O, Prophet, Allah increases our faith in you through everything." Thereby he meant that the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) got to know what was not heard by anyone, which was a miracle indeed. Then, he submitted, "It is true that I had composed some lines of poetry within my heart, something not heard even by my own ears." The Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Let us hear them." Then he recited the following lines of poetry he had composed:

I fed you in childhood and took care of you when young.
You lived on my earnings alone.

When on some night, you became sick,
I spent the whole night remaining awake and restless because of your sickness.

As if your sickness was my own and not yours and because of
which my eyes kept shedding tears throughout the night.

My heart kept trembling lest something happens to you,
though I knew that the time of death is fixed, being neither
early nor late.

So, when you reached the age and maturity that I had always
been looking forward to.

Then you made hard-heartedness and harshness my return as
if you were the one doing me favours and giving me rewards.

Alas, if it was not possible for you to fulfil my right as a father,
you could have at the least done what a good neighbour would
have done.

So, you could have given me the least right of a neighbour and
abstained from becoming miserly in my case in my own
property.

After having heard these verses of poetry, the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) held the son by his shirt and said, “Go. You and your property, everything belongs to your father. (Tafsir al-Qurtubi, p. 246, v10)
These verses have also been reported in *Hamamasah*, the famous book of Arabic literature as attributed to the poet, Umaiyyah ibn Abi as-Sult. Others say that Abd al-A’la wrote them. Still others attribute them to Abu al-Abbas al-A’ma. *(Imam Qurtubi, marginal notes)*

In the last verse quoted above: “Your Lord knows best what is in your hearts”, any possible scruple that remains in the hearts of children as to how they were going to comply satisfactorily with divine injunctions relating to consistent observance of etiquette and respect due to parents. They have to live with parents all the time. Then, living conditions of the parties vary. They do not stay the same all the time. May be, on some such occasion, they happen to utter something, something that turns out to be against the norms of due etiquette, then, they stand facing the warning of Hell. Given this probability, it would become extremely difficult for them to wriggle out from this situation. In this verse, it is to remove this doubt and heart-burning that it was said: Should any such word come to be uttered out of sheer anxiety or lack of discretion but, without intentional disrespectfulness - then, one must repent and resolve not to do that ever again. If so, since Allah knows the secrets of hearts and knows what was uttered, was not to show disrespect or hurt, things will turn out for the better, for He is Most-Merciful. The word: “those who turn to Him”, used here carries the sense of: *al-tawwabin*: those who repent before Him. The *Hadith* calls the six *raka’at* after *Maghrib* and the *nawafil* of *al-Ishraq* as the *Salah al-awwabin*. Embedded here is the hint that the ability) to perform these prayers is granted only to those who are the *awwabin and tawwabin*.

And worship Allah and do not associate with Him anything, and be good to parents and to kinsmen and orphans and the needy and the close neighbour and the distant neighbour and the companion at your side and the wayfarer and to those owned by you. Surely, Allah does not like those who are arrogant, proud, those who are miserly and bid people to be miserly, and conceal what Allah has given them of His grace - We have prepared for the disbelievers a humiliating punishment and (for) those who spend their wealth to show off before people and do not believe in Allah and the Last Day. And for whomsoever Satan is a companion, then, evil he is as a companion. *(Al-Quran 4:36-38)*

**Sequence**

It will be noticed that human rights have remained the main focus of attention since the beginning of the present *Surah* up to this point. These related to orphans, the women and inheritance. Taken up now are rights of parents, relatives, neighbours and those of human beings in general. Since a perfect fulfilment of these rights is possible only at the hands of a person whose orientation to Allah, His Messenger (peace be upon him) and to the answerability of the Last Day is correct and strong, and who avoids miserliness, arrogance and affectation, being impediments to all positive efforts, the text presents the need to believe in the Oneness of Allah, to avoid any association with His pristine divinity, and to stay away from the rejection of the meeting on the Last Day. Also taken to task are ways of the disbelievers who disobey the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) and revel in their miserliness.

**Commentary**

**The reason why Tawhid recedes rights**

There are many wise considerations in opening the roster of rights with the exhortation to worship Allah alone and not to associate with Him anything in that worship. One of these, and a
basic one indeed, is having the fear of Allah and the conscious concern to fulfil His rights. A person who is-neglectful on that score can hardly be expected to remain particular about fulfilling the rights of anybody else. He will find one or the other excuse to satisfy his immediate circle of relatives and friends, to keep his prestige in the society or to escape the law of the government. What really forces him to honour human rights, watched or unwatched, is nothing but the fear of Allah and the sense of responsibility before Him. This fear and this taqwa is achieved through nothing but Tawhid, the firm belief in the Oneness of Allah to the total exclusion of everything else in that uniqueness. This is why it was appropriate to remind man about the Oneness of Allah and the need to worship Him before describing the rights of relatives and others.

The rights of parents come first after the message of Tawhid

By taking up the rights of parents immediately after the command to worship Allah as is His due, it is being suggested that, no doubt all blessings and favours are really from Allah Almighty, yet seen in terms of worldly means, the frequency of favours received by man, closest next to those of Allah Almighty, are those he receives from his parents. This is because they are, given the chain of causation, the very fountain-head of their being. And in all those stages of trial from the birth of a child to his young age, the parents are the ones who take care of the being, sustenance and growth of man to the best of their ability and God-given means. This is why the command to worship and obey Allah has also been supplemented with the mention of the rights of parents at other places in the Holy Quran. At one place it is said: Be grateful to Me, and to your parents (Al-Qur’an 31:14). At another place, it is said:

And when We made the children' of Israel take a pledge: You shall not worship anyone but Allah; and to parents you shall be good ... (Al-Qur’an 2:83)

In the verses quoted above, the text does not say that one should fulfil the rights of parents or serve them. The word used here is Ihsan (doing good) which, being far more comprehensive, includes spending to support them as needed, to be of service to them physically when so required, not to talk to them in a voice too sharp or too loud causing disrespect, not to say anything to them which may break their heart, and not to treat their friends and well-wishers in any manner which hurts them. On the contrary, one should do everything possible to comfort and please them. Even if the parents have fallen short in fulfilling the due rights of children, the children should never take it as an excuse for their own ill-treatment. Mu’adh ibn Jabal says that, out of the ten things the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) had asked me to be particular about, one was:

Do not associate anyone with Allah even if you are killed or burnt alive'; and the second was: 'Do not disobey or hurt your parents even if they ask you to leave your children and family.' (Musnad Ahmad)

Besides the great emphasis laid on obedience to parents and on treating them well as in the sayings of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) there are countless merits and grades of reward promised for those who do so: Ahadith in al-Bukhari and Muslim reports that the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

One who wishes to have his earnings and life increased by the blessing of Allah should fulfil the rights of his relatives.'
A narration in *Tirmidi* says:

The pleasure of Allah lies in the pleasure of the father and the displeasure of Allah, in the displeasure of the father.

*Al-Baihaqi* reports in *Shu’ab al-’Iman* that the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

When a son who is obedient to his parents and looks at them with love and regard, every glance of his brings forth for him the reward of an accepted Hajj.

According to another narration from *Al-Baihaqi*, the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

Allah Almighty forgives most sins but one who disobeys and hurts his parents is condemned to face all sorts of unforeseen troubles right here in this mortal world, much before the ultimate reckoning of the Hereafter.

Allah says

Say, "Come, I recite what your Lord has prohibited for you: "Do not associate anything with Him (as partners); and be good to parents, and do not kill your children because of poverty - We will give provision to you, and to them as well - and do not go near shameful acts, whether they are open or secret; and do not kill a person whom Allah has given sanctity, except by right." This is what He has emphasized for you, so that you may understand. *(Al-Quran 6:151)*

**Commentary**

Prior to the verses appearing above, for about two to three sections, the recurring theme has been how heedless and ignorant' human beings had bypassed the law revealed by the Law Giver and the Creator of whatever there is in the heavens and the earth and, in its place, had taken ancestral and innovated customs as their religion. There were things Allah had made unlawful. They took them as lawful and started using them. Then, there were things Allah had made lawful. They made these unlawful for themselves. Again, they made some things lawful for men and unlawful for women, while some others they declared to be lawful for women but unlawful for men.

There are three verses here *(Al-Qur'an 143, 144 and 145)* which describe those particular things which have been declared unlawful by Allah. There are nine things mentioned in the detailed statement *(Al-Qur'an 151-152)*. After that, comes the tenth commandment in the words: 'That is, this path of Mine is straight. So, follow it'. This statement points out to the religion and code brought and taught by the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) and entrusts the whole field of *Halal* (lawful) and *Haram* (unlawful), permissible and impermissible, reprehensible and recommended to the standard that everyone should follow the *Muhammadi Shari'ah*, take what it says is *Halal as Halal*, and take what it says is *Haram as Haram*, and let no one go about deciding what is *Halal* and what is *Haram* on one's own.

Then, there appears a detailed statement of ten things in these verses where the real objective is to describe things which are *Haram* - which required that all these be described in the
negative case. But, the Holy Qur'an, in the wisdom of its approach, has described some of them positively in the imperative form - which means that acting against it is Haram (Kashshaf). Its wisdom will become evident a little later. However, the ten things the unlawfulness of which appears in these verses are:

1. To associate anyone with Allah in belief, deed, worship or obedience;
2. not be good to parents;
3. to kill children because of poverty;
4. to indulge in shameful doings;
5. to kill someone unjustly;
6. to eat up the orphan's property by false means;
7. to weigh or measure short;
8. to be unjust in witness, judgement or speech;
9. to betray the covenant of Allah; and
10. to avoid the straight path of Allah and follow other ways right and left.

Some Virtues of the Verses

Ka'b al-Ahbar, an accomplished scholar of the Torah, was a Jew before he became a Muslim. He says that these verses of the Holy Qur'an which describe ten unlawful things are with what the Torah, the Book of Allah, begins after Bismillah. It has also been said that these are the ten commandments revealed to Prophet Musa (upon him be peace). Commentator of the Al-Qur'an, Abdullah ibn Abbas says that these are the ‘Verses of Established Meaning’ (Muhkam Ayat) mentioned in Surah 'Al-'Imran (Al-Qur'an 3:7). On these, all religious systems brought by Prophets from Adam (upon him be peace) to the Last among Prophets - have been in agreement and none of these was abrogated in any religion, community or Shari'ah. (Tafsir Al-Bahr Al-Muhit)

These Verses are the Will and Testament of the Holy Prophet

According to a narration of Abdullah ibn Masud reported in Tafsir Ibn Kathir, he said that a person who wishes to see a special will of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), with his seal on it, he should recite these verses. Therein lies the will and testament bequeathed under the command of his Lord by the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) to his Ummah.

Based on a narration of Ubada ibn Samit it has been reported by Hakim that, addressing his Sahabah, the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

Who will take a pledge of allegiance at my hands (bay'ah) on three verses? After that, he recited these three verses and said: 'A person who fulfils this Bay'ah (pledge of allegiance), his reward stands due with Allah.

Details of ten prohibitions and explanation of the three verses

These verses (Al-Qur’an 151-153) open with the words: Say, "Come, I recite what your Lord has prohibited for you". The word: t'a law, here translated as 'come,' does carry the essential meaning, but misses the refinement of what it implies in the text – a difficulty technically impossible to surmount in a task of this delicate nature when exact parallels just do not exist) is an expression used at a time when the caller stands on high ground and calls those beneath to
come close to him. The hint thus released is towards the prospect of their rising high and gaining prestige by accepting this invitation. The sense of the sentence where the address is to the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), is that he should ask these people to come along so that he may recite to them things which Allah has made Haram for them. What he was going to give them was a message directly from Allah and, as such, there was no intrusion of someone’s opinion, estimation or conjecture in it. This was in their interest so that they could get ready to stay safe against them, rather than go about branding as Haram what Allah has made Halal. Though the address in this verse directly refers to the disbelievers of Makkah, but the subject of the address is general in its nature. It includes the entire humankind, whether believers or disbelievers, Arabs or non-Arabs, or those living now or generations to come in the future. (Al-Bahr Al-Muhit)

The First Grave Sin Forbidden is Shirk

After having addressed with this concern and elegance, the first thing to be identified of all that has been prohibited was: That you shall not associate anyone or anything with Allah. This was the first task. And do not make idols into God like the polytheists of Arabia, nor call prophets God or son of God like Jews and Christians, nor take angels to be daughters of God like others, nor equate prophets and saints with Allah in His attributes of knowledge and power like the ignorant masses.

Shirk: Definition and Kinds

According to Tafsir Mazhari, the word: shai’an: anything, at this place, could also mean that one should not be involved in any kind of Shirk, whether manifest (jaliyy) or concealed (khafiyy). Everyone knows manifest Shirk which is the ascribing of equals or partners to Allah either by associating someone with Allah in worship and obedience or in His exclusive attributes. And concealed Shirk is that one, in his or her vocation in life, in material and religious objectives and in profit and loss, though holds the belief that Allah is the Maker and Mover of things yet, in practice, takes others as such, and pins all efforts and hopes on them, or is a hypocrite in acts of worship, offering prayers correctly to show off before others, or spends in charity to earn a good name for himself, or actually, in practice, takes someone other than Allah to be the controlling authority in profit and loss. The sage, Shaykh Sadi has put the idea in a nutshell when he said:

Concealed here too is a kind of Shirk - That A made me gain and B made me lose.

The reality is no more but that, whatever the gain or loss, it is from that Absolute Master. The supposed names A and B are drapes from behind which comes the manifestation of gain or loss. Otherwise, the truth of the matter, as it appears in Sahih Hadith, is:

If all Jinns and human beings join up to bring to you a benefit which Allah has not destined for you, they can never dare do that - in the same way, if all Jinns and human beings join up to bring a loss on you which Allah has not willed, this too is not possible for anyone to do.

In brief, one should abstain strictly from both kinds of Shirk, manifest and concealed. The way worshiping idols is included under Shirk, also included there under is equating prophets and saints with Allah in His attributes of knowledge and power. If, God forbid, this happens to be the
very belief of someone, then, it will be classed as manifest Shirk; and if, such a belief is not there, but this happens to be done in actual practice, then, it will be called concealed Shirk. At this place, the very first instruction given is to stay away from Shirk. The reason is that Shirk is a sin about which the Qur’an has given the decision that, for it, there is no forgiveness. The forgiveness of sins other than Shirk Abu Ad-Darda it appears in Hadith that the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

Do not ascribe anyone as partner with Allah - even if you are dismembered, or hanged, or burnt alive.

The Second Sin: Mistreating Parents

Mentioned after that was: “and be good to parents”. The purpose at this place is to tell not to be disobedient to parents and not to cause pain to them. But, it: is in a way of wisdom that the prohibition has been sublimated as 'be good to parents.' The aim is to point out that, in the matter of parents, it is not enough that one does not disobey parents or does not cause any pain to them, but it is one’s duty to keep them pleased with decent, generous and obliging treatment. This has been made more explicit in another verse of the Qur’an where it appears as: which means: "For them, lower your shoulders in humility" – Al-Qur’an 17:24 - (an eloquently figurative mode of describing the attitude of love, reverence, readiness and availability to help out and care for, in all sincerity, and in tenderness at its sublime, something the Al-Qur’an has itself put in one word, 'mercy', suffixed after the words of the verse quoted above).

It will be noticed that, in this verse, causing pain to parents or exposing them to physical or emotional inconveniences has been placed as the second sin after Shirk. This is similar to the instruction given in another verse of the Holy Qur’an where Allah has combined the duty of being obedient to them, and being responsible to see that they are comfortable, with the obligation to worship Him alone. It was said:

And your Lord has decreed that you shall not worship anyone other than Him and that you shall be good to parents. (Al-Quran 17:23)

Then, in Surah Luqman, it was said:

Be grateful to Me, and to your parents, and to Me is the return (meaning: If you do otherwise, you will be punished. (Al-Quran 31:14)

It has been reported from Abdullah ibn Mas’ud in the Sahihayn (the two collections by Al-Bukhari and Muslim) that he asked the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him),

‘Which deed is the best?’ He said: ‘Offering prayer at its due time (Mustahabb or recommended time).’ Then, he asked again: ‘After that, which deed is the best?’ To that, he said: ‘Being good to parents.’ Once again, he asked: ‘Which deed comes after that?’ He said: ‘Jihad in the way of Allah.’

According to a narration by Abu Hurairah reported in Sahih Muslim, once the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), said the words: three times, that is,
Disgraced is he, disgraced is he, disgraced is he.' The noble Companions submitted: 'O, Prophet, who is disgraced?' He said: 'The person who found his father and mother, or one of them, in old age and still he did not enter the Paradise.

It means that serving parents during their old age makes it certain that the server will be admitted to Paradise. And certainly deprived and disgraced is he who has allowed such an easy bargain of Paradise slip out of his hands. This bargain is easy because parents are naturally affectionate to their children on their own. A little consideration here and there would make them all too happy. So, pleasing parents does not depend on or require a major act of grace. The restriction of old age placed here is because parents, when healthy and strong, take care of their needs by themselves - rather, would not hesitate to come to their assistance when needed, financially, physically or morally. At that time, neither do they need being served, nor would that service carry any distinct weight of its own. Serving parents can only be worthwhile and praiseworthy at a time when they need it because of their old age.

And We have instructed man to do good to his parents. And if they insist upon you that you should ascribe partners to Me, then do not obey them. To Me is your return; then I shall tell you about what you used to do. And those who believe and do righteous deeds, We shall include them among the righteous. (Al-Quran 29:8-9)

Commentary

"And We have instructed man". Wasiyyah means to call someone for some action, when the call is based on advice and well wishing. (Mazhari)

"To do good to his parents". The Word Husn is an infinitive which means ' to be good'. What is meant here is to adopt good behaviour. The meaning of the sentence is quite clear that Allah has advised man to treat his parents kindly.

"And if they insist upon you that you should ascribe partners to Me", It should be taken note of that the limit of kind treatment with parents should not go beyond the point where it comes in conflict with the injunctions of Allah. If they force toward infidelity or associating some one with Allah, then they must not be obeyed, as advised in a Hadith:

‘A created being must not be obeyed in disobedience of the Creator.’

This hadith has been reported by Imam Ahmad and Hakim who has held it as Sahih. This verse was revealed in connection with Sa’d Ibn Abi Waqqas. He was one of the ten companions to whom the Holy Prophet had given the good news of being in paradise, and who are called Al-’Asharah Al-mubashsharah. He was an extremely obedient son of his mother and was always alert to look after her comfort. When his mother, Hamnah bint Abi Sufyan, learnt that her son, Sa’d, had accepted Islam, she got very upset and warned him against that, and then swore an oath that she would neither eat nor drink unless he turned back to his ancestral religion, or she would die of thirst and hunger, and he would be blamed universally for being the killer of his mother. (Muslim, Tirmidhi)

Through this Qur’anic verse Sa’d was commanded not to listen to his mother. Baghawi has reported in his narration that the mother of Sayyidna Sa’d did not eat and drink for a day and night, and according to some other versions, for three days and three nights, and sticking to her
oath, remained hungry and thirsty. For Sa’d mother’s love and obedience was one thing, but Allah’s command was another, which naturally took precedence over every thing else. So he went to her and said to her firmly

Dear mother, if there were hundred spirits in your body, and they were departing one by one, I would not have deserted my religion even seeing that scenario. It is now up to you whether you eat and drink or die. In any case I cannot abandon my religion.

Having been disappointed by his firmness, she started eating food.