

Notes

Ibn Taymiyyah's The Removal of Blame From the Great Imams

by

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- I. None of the imams intentionally opposed the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)
 - a. They believe that words of anyone other than the Prophet may be accepted or rejected
- II. If the opinions of any of the accepted imams are found to be in opposition to an authentic hadith, there is a valid excuse for it and generally falls into one of **three categories**
 - a. **First Category:** Scholar does not believe that the Prophet (pbuh) ever said such a thing. There are various reasons for this
 - b. **Second Category:** Scholar does not think that the hadith is intended to refer to the issue in question
 - c. **Third Category:** Scholar believes that the ruling is abrogated
- III. **Reasons for the Differences**
 - a. **Reason 1:** The hadith may have never reached him
 - i. Hence, he gives a ruling based on a verse of Qur'an or another hadith
 - ii. It's not possible for one person to know all of the hadiths
 1. Mujtahid's objective should be to know most of the hadiths so that only a few of the details will escape him
 - iii. This is the most likely reason that is found in the opinions of the pious predecessors (salaf)
 1. Ex: Abu Bakr did not know the inheritance of the grandmother even though he spent so much time with the Prophet and Umar didn't know the Sunnah on seeking permission before entering a house. Similar examples are there from Uthman and Ali's lives.
 - a. Those less knowledgeable than them had the hadiths with them and told them about it
 - b. If this was the case with the Sahabah, the most knowledgeable, then what of those in later generations?
 - iv. The collections of hadiths that were compiled came after these imams
 - b. **Reason 2:** The hadith reached the Mujtahid but not authentically
 - i. But it may have reached other imams authentically
 1. Ex: the hadith reaches one Mujtahid with a broken chain but to another with an unbroken chain
 - ii. It may be that the Mujtahid thinks the hadith is not authentic but it actually is
 1. Ex: he considers someone in the chain as unknown but he is known to another imam
 - iii. This reason was common among the Tabi'een and the Tabi' Tabi'een up to the time of the well-known imams
 1. Because hadiths had spread wide by then and to some they reached authentically while to others they did not
 2. This is why the imams in this era would say if a hadith reaches them authentically, they would change their ruling on a matter
 - c. **Reason 3:** The scholar makes ijtihaad and declares the hadith weak
 - i. But another scholar's ijtihaad may conclude it to be authentic
 1. Reasons

- a. One scholar considers a particular transmitter in the hadith as not trustworthy while another scholar disagrees
- b. One scholar does not believe that the transmitter heard the hadith from the narrator he is transmitting from while another scholar disagrees
- c. One scholar thinks that a particular narrator transmitted the hadith in a state of confusion [he may have lost his books, he became confused later in age, etc.] while another scholar disagrees and believes the narrator reported the hadith in his sound state
- d. Transmitter forgets that he related a particular hadith and is unable to remember it at a later date or denies that he ever related such a hadith. This causes one scholar to deny the hadith considering it defective while another scholar still accepts it and does not consider it defective
- e. Many Hijaazi scholars held the view that unless a hadith originated in Hijaaz, it should not be cited as evidence. Hence, they did not accept hadiths that originated in Iraq or Shaam.
 - i. Because they thought that the Hijaazi people had mastered the Sunnah so that not a single hadith had escaped them and they looked at hadiths originating in Iraq or Shaam with suspicion
 - 1. Some of the Iraqi scholars thought the same about hadiths originating in Shaam
 - 2. Ibn Taymiyyah points out that most people of knowledge don't use this criteria as a basis to weaken hadiths. He further says that the hadiths should be accepted as long as its chain of narrators is sound no matter where it originated from.
 - f. There are other reasons as well, Ibn Taymiyyah points out, but does not mention them.
- d. **Reason 4:** One scholar stipulates certain conditions for the acceptance of a hadith while another scholar opposes him because he does not accept such conditions
 - i. Examples
 - 1. Some say the hadith must be compared to what is in the Qur'an and established Sunnah
 - 2. Some say that the transmitter must be a jurist if his narration contradicts that which can be deduced through textual principles
 - 3. Some say that the narration of the hadith needs to be widespread and known if it deals with an issue known to have occurred frequently at the time of the Prophet
 - 4. There are other conditions placed as well which Ibn Taymiyyah does not mention
- e. **Reason 5:** The hadith reaches the scholar authentically but he has forgotten about it.
 - i. Ex: When Umar gave a fatwa saying that a person in a state of major ritual impurity must not pray until he finds water. Then 'Ammar reminded him of the hadith in which prophet allowed Umar and 'Ammar to do Tayammum in such a case
 - 1. After this reminder Umar still could not recall the incident
 - ii. Such incidents frequently occur among the early and later scholars
- f. **Reason 6:** The scholar does not know the implication of the concerned hadith
 - i. Reasons
 - 1. The scholar is unfamiliar with a particular term mentioned in the hadith or he disagrees with other scholars with regards to its meaning
 - a. Ex: the word *ighlaaq*. Scholars differed as to what it means

2. The scholar understands a particular term in the hadith in a way which is common in his own custom and dialect; however, it was understood differently at the Prophet's time
 - a. Usually because he views that a word retains its original meaning until proven otherwise
 - b. Ex: some thought the word *khamr* in the Qur'an and Sunnah refers to intoxicants made from grapes only because this was what it meant in their own dialect. But there are hadiths which clarify that its meaning refers to every type of intoxicating drink
 3. Certain terms in the Qur'an and hadiths can be homonyms, ambivalent in their meanings, or hovering between the literal and the metaphorical. So the scholar takes what he thinks is the nearest to the intended meaning but is wrong
 - a. Ex:
 - i. The companion who thought the white and black thread in the Qur'anic verse about beginning the fast was literal but it was only metaphorical
 - ii. The scholars who understand the word *hands* in the verse dealing with dry ablution (tayammum) to mean entire arm up to the armpit
 4. Sometimes the hadith's import is obscure
 - a. Indications that can be drawn from a statement are very diverse and people differ in their ability to comprehend them
 - i. Ex: a scholar might know the general implication of a text but he might not recognize that this specific case is included within that general context
 1. Or he may have realized it but had forgotten later on
 5. It is also possible that a person commits a mistake by deriving from a statement what is not conceivable within the Arabic language with which the Prophet (peace be on him) was sent
- g. **Reason 7:** Scholar thinks that the hadith does not carry any specific implication
- i. The difference between this reason and the one before it is that in the previous [instance] the scholar did not know that specific implication whereas in this reason he knows the specific implication but believes that it ought not to be applied based on some principles he had which invalidated that implication, regardless of whether he was in reality right or wrong.
 1. Ex: scholar believes that the specified general text is not a valid proof, or that the implication is not a valid proof, or that a general ruling established for a specific cause is applied only where that cause exists, or that a general imperative does not necessitate obligation or immediate compliance, or that the alif and laam [constituents of the Arabic definite article] do not denote generality, or that negated verbs neither negate its essence nor all of its rulings, etc.
 - ii. Half of the disputes arisen in *usul ul fiqh* fall under this field [of implications]
- h. **Reason 8:** The scholar deems that implication of the text to be opposed by something indicating that it could not have been so intended
- i. Ex: general term being opposed by a specific one, an absolute term (*al-mutlaq*) by a qualified one (*al-muqayyad*), an absolute imperative by that which negates it, or the literal (*al-haqiqah*) one by that which indicates a metaphor (*al-majaz*), and so on.

- i. **Reason 9:** The scholar thinks that the hadith is opposed by contrary evidence which is accepted by all scholars, such as a Qur'anic verse, another hadith, or consensus, thereby indicating the hadith's weakness, abrogation, or interpretation if it is amenable to interpretation
 - i. Two types
 - 1. The scholar believes that the contrary evidence is preferable (rajih) in general, leading to one of the three possibilities *without* specifying any one of them
 - a. Weakening of the hadith
 - b. Its abrogation
 - c. Its interpretation away from the undesirable meaning
 - 2. The scholar specifies one of the three possibilities mentioned above
 - a. He may err though
 - i. There is the possibility, however, that he might commit a mistake regarding the abrogation by considering the later evidence to be the earlier one
 - ii. He might err in interpretation by understanding the hadith in a way which its wording does not permit, or where there is something extraneous which rules out that interpretation
 - iii. It is possible that the opposing hadith is not equal in strength to the first one in terms of the authenticity of its chain of transmitters and the clarity of its text (matn)
 - ii. In most cases, the claim of a consensus is actually no more than the absence of knowledge about any opposing opinion
 - 1. This is due to the fact that the ultimate aim for many scholars is to know the opinions of the scholars who were their contemporaries within their region while not knowing the opinions of other scholars
 - a. Some knew opinions of only the Medinan or Kufan scholars while not others
 - b. Some knew only 2-3 reputable scholars' opinions and not others so they thought it was a consensus
 - 2. Fearing to go against the consensus or believing that they may be going against the consensus led many scholars to not adhere to the obvious import of the evidence [in some cases]
- j. **Reason 10:** The scholar thinks the hadith was opposed by evidence indicating the hadith's weakness, abrogation, or contrary interpretation, whereas his view that this is a contrary evidence is not shared by other scholars, or even by those who belong to his group, or the contrary evidence is not in reality the prevalent one
 - i. Ex: Kufans who, when an authentic hadith is opposed by the apparent meaning of a Qur'anic text, believe that the apparent Qur'anic text, such as one expressing generality, is given preference over the explicit meaning of a hadith
 - ii. Sometimes a scholar might consider something to be apparent which is not in reality apparent; this is because there are many potential implications of a statement

IV. Other Issues

- a. It is possible in many cases that the scholar has a proof for not acting upon a hadith which we are not aware of because the ways of comprehending knowledge are manifold and we cannot know all of what is in the hearts of the scholars
 - i. But it is not permitted for us to follow this opinion in light of an opinion that is established with an authentic hadith and is followed by some people of knowledge
 - 1. Because the opinion of the scholar whose evidence is unknown may be wrong

- ii. Hence, he may have a valid excuse for not following the Shari' evidence
- b. The Mujtahid, despite his error, is rewarded because of his ijthad and his mistake is forgiven due to the fact that arriving at the correct opinion on every occasion is either impossible or highly unlikely
- c. Three possibilities for one who did not act in accordance to a given hadith. Either:
 - i. His leaving the hadith was permissible
 - 1. For example, he was unaware of it
 - ii. His leaving the hadith was not permissible.
 - 1. This is unlikely for the great imams. They would not leave a hadith unless due to a legitimate reason
 - iii. He gave an opinion without fully comprehending the issue
 - 1. He may be deficient in his deduction so he concludes without an evidence though he may have used some sort of ijthaad
 - a. He may be influenced by a custom or predisposition
 - b. He may have not taken his reasoning to its appropriate conclusion
- d. Scholars sometimes disagree whether a given hadith is explicit (nass) or apparent (zaahir) in its implication
- e. Conceivable interpretation of the texts plays a role in differences as well
- f. Some scholars differed whether a certain action was totally forbidden or just disliked
- g. If a scholar has a reasonable interpretation for a hadith, then it cannot be said that he will be liable for the punishment stated in the hadith
 - i. Ex: a hadith says such and such should not be done else will be punished in the afterlife but scholar allows that action based on interpreting the hadith differently
 - ii. For the punishment to apply, there must be absence of all conditions which prevent the blame from taking place (evidence never reached the scholar, he misunderstood something, etc.) and the absence of all the impediments (repentance, doing good deeds which remove bad deeds, Allah's Mercy, trials and tribulations in life which may make up for it, etc.)
 - 1. It may apply to those who were aware
 - a. It's case by case basis [my comment]
- h. Majority of the Salaf say that Allah has only one [correct] ruling with regard to any given issue and the one who differs from this position based on an *acceptable* piece of ijthad is mistaken, excused, and rewarded
- i. Whenever it is possible for a person to know the truth and he falls short, he is not to be excused
 - i. Those who fall short in their ijthad due to invalid reasons or those who imitate with a standard that could not make the action permissible could be liable to punishment in the hereafter
 - 1. Unless there are other impediments which may remove it (repentance, good deeds which remove bad ones, etc.)
 - 2. If however he sought the truth [to the best of his ability] and did not leave it to his own desires, then Allah does not burden a soul beyond what it can bear
 - ii. Those who practice legitimate ijthaad are not included under this because they have a valid excuse, rather, they will be rewarded for their ijthad even when wrong
- j. In disputed matters, it is not allowed to say that specific people are cursed under the threat of punishment mentioned in certain hadiths because there may be impediments which prevent the threat and/or punishment from them (repentance, good deeds erasing bad ones, etc.)

- i. Ex: a hadith says those who do such and such are cursed but you find a scholar who allows that action. It may be that the scholar interprets that hadith differently [based on sound evidence] or if the doer is a layman, he might repent or his good deeds outweigh his bad ones or tribulations in his life might remove that sin from him or Allah may have mercy on him, etc. These impediments could apply to the mujtahid as well.
- ii. Hadiths which speak about cursing those who perform certain actions are to be understood in general terms and not specific. So we say those who do such acts are under the threat mentioned in the hadith but we don't specify certain people individually of being guilty of the curse because the curse may not apply to them due to absence of certain conditions (ex: the knowledge did not reach him) or presence of certain impediments (ex: repentance, Allah's Mercy, good deeds remove bad deeds, etc.).