

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

A Letter On The Censure of Taqleed

(part 1)

By

Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhaab

Translated by
Abu Maryam

From Muhammad Bin Abdul Wahhaab

to

Abdullah Bin Muhammad Bin Abdul Lateef (ash-Shaafa'i),

May Allah Preserve him. Peace, Mercy and Blessings of Allah be upon you.

We have received some letters from your side which contain harsh refutations of me. When it was mentioned that you were among the authors, I was surprised because Allah has put your love in peoples' hearts and you are favorably remembered, a blessing which most people are not blessed with. This is because you are reported to have opposed bad rulers. And (I was surprised because) I know of your love for Allah and His Prophet *صلي الله عليه وسلم* and of your good understanding (of Islam) and following the truth even if your biggest *Imams* oppose it.

This is because when I met you about 20 years ago, we studied some *Tafseer* and *Hadith*. You showed me some pages of *Sahih al-Bukhari* which you had hand-written along with the notes you had copied from the commentaries on *Sahih Al-Bukhari*. In the issue of *Eeman* that Bukhari mentions in the beginning of his *Sahih*, you had said this is (the belief) with which I obey and worship Allah. I was pleased to hear this because this is against what your *Imaams* of theological rhetoric say. Also you discussed some other religious issues, so that I mention to my students the good understanding and love for Allah and the hereafter that Allah has blessed you with.

So due to all this I did not expect such haste from you in this matter, because the people who wrote these letters are wrong whatever the case. This is because if their opponents (i.e. me) are upon the truth, then (their error) is clear. And if they are correct, then the one who calls towards Allah should do so with in (a way) that is better, except with such of them as do wrong (29:46). Indeed Allah ordered Moosa and Haroon to speak to Fir'aun mildly, that he may accept admonition and fear (Allah) (20:44).

It is befitting for the Judge, may Allah Honor him due to trial that he is put to by Allah by virtue of this position, that he may behave in the manner Allah has mentioned in His Book which He sent down to explain clearly to the people those things in which they differ, and (as) a guidance and a mercy for a folk who believe (16:64). From these manners is that he should not be deceived by people who do not believe, and that he should be firm when faced with evil efforts of evil-doers and hypocrites and should not be hasty.

Indeed Allah has Described the characteristic of the hypocrites in His Book, and has Mentioned the types of hypocrites so that we may avoid them. He Described the hypocrites as being eloquent and having pleasing appearances, **“And when you look at them, their bodies (appearance) please you; and when they speak, you listen to their words.”** (63:4). He Described them as scheming, lying and making fun of the believers in the beginning of *Surah Al-Baqarah* , and as saying dubious words, entering into disputes between people in a way that is disliked by Allah and His Prophet صلي الله عليه وسلم , **“And let not those grieve you who rush with haste to disbelieve”** (3:176).

He Described them as belittling the believers, and being content with their own evil deeds etc. in *Surah Al-Baqarah*, *at-Tauba*, *al-Qitaal* etc. He Mentioned all of this to let us avoid these characteristics and those who have these.

Allah, in more than one place of the Quraan, Told his Messenger صلي الله عليه وسلم not to obey them, so how can it be permissible for a person like you to obey them. And what is more disappointing is for you to believe that they are knowledgeable, to visit their homes and glorify them; I don't say this about a particular person (but generally). This is only a sincere advise to make known what is in Allah's Book about management (سياسة) of religious and worldly affairs, because most of the people have casted it behind their backs.

What has been mentioned to you about me, it is not something I have said out of ignorance. I say, all praise is for Allah for His Favors and with Him is the Power, that truly, my Lord has guided me to a Straight Path, a right religion, the religion of Ibrahim, *Haneef* (i.e. the true monotheism) and he was not from the polytheists (6:161).

I don't, all praises are for Allah, call to the way (*madhab*) of a *sufi*, or a jurist, or a person of theological rhetoric, or an *Imam* from the *Imams* I have deep respect for like Ibn Al-Qayyim, adh-Dhahabi, Ibn Katheer etc. Instead, I call towards Allah alone, Who does not have any partners and towards the *Sunnah* of the Prophet صلي الله عليه وسلم which he ordered all of his *Ummah* to follow, the first of them and the last of them.

I wish that I may never reject the truth when it comes to me. Instead, I make Allah, His angels and all of his creation witnesses that if a true word comes to us from your side, I will accept it with readily and throw against the wall all that that opposes it from the sayings of all my *Imams* except the Prophet صلي الله عليه وسلم, since he does not speak except the truth. And the reality of this is not hidden from you, as it is well known from the Prophet صلي الله عليه وسلم, his companions, their

followers, those who came after them (i.e. the first three generations), the *Imams* like ash-Shaafa'i, Ahmed and others like them who are agreed upon to be rightly guided and those of their followers for whom the good has preceded from Allah.

It is also not hidden from you what the people have invented in their religion, and how they have opposed the way of their Salaf. You will find that the majority of those who came later (in Islam) have changed and distorted (the true form of Islam). The most knowledgeable and pious *Imams* of the later scholars like Ibn Al-Qayyim, adh-Dhahabi, Ibn Katheer and Ibn Rajab strongly refuted the people of their times, who were better than Ibn Hajar (Al-Haithami ash-Shaafa'i; died 974 H) and the author of "*Al-Iqna' bil Ijma'*" (Ibn Qattan Al-Faasi died 628 H).

When the people of their times said these people (whom the aforementioned *Imams* opposed) are correct because they are more numerous and because the people flock to them, these *Imams* said this is the biggest proof that these people are upon falsehood, since the Prophet صلي الله عليه وسلم has already told us that his *Ummah* will follow the ways of the Jews and Christians like the fins of an arrow which are aligned together (i.e. they go in the same direction, following each other) so much so that even if the Jews and Christians entered a hole of a mastigure (lizard-like reptile), they would follow them inside (*Mustadrak Al-Hakim*).

And Allah Mentioned in His Book that the Jews and Christians divided their religion and broke up into sects (6:159), used to write the book with their own hands (and then say "This is from Allah") (2:79) and that they left the Scripture and did not act upon it and instead concentrated on the books that their predecessors had written (invented). Allah Mentioned that He had Told them to remain united and that they did not differ amongst themselves because the religion was unclear to them, but because **"Those who were given the Scripture (Jews and Christians) did not differ except out of mutual jealousy, after knowledge had come to them"** (3:19). Allah said **"But they have broken their religion among them into books"** (23:53).

So when the believer hears the saying of the Prophet صلي الله عليه وسلم that "You will follow the ways of those nations who were before you" (*Sahih Al-Bukhari in "Holding Fast to the Qur'an and Sunnah"*), and keeps it in front of him, it becomes clear to him that these verses are not, like what the ignorant people think, just about a people who used to be once upon a time and then went away. Instead he will understand what 'Umar Bin Al-Khattaab is reported to have said about these verses, "Those people have gone and now Allah Intends you people".

Indeed Allah has obligated his slaves to ask Him to Guide them to the straight path, the way of those on whom He has bestowed His Grace, not (the way) of those who earned His Anger (i.e. the Jews), nor of those who went astray (i.e. the Christians) (1:6-7) in every prayer. So, anyone who knows Islam and what the people have fallen into by distorting their religion, appreciates why this supplication is made in such a quantity and the Wisdom of Allah in that.

So in sum, the issue at hand is:

- 1) Is it obligatory on every Muslim to seek the knowledge of what Allah has revealed to his Prophet sallallahu alaihi wasallam (i.e. Quraan and *Sunnah*) and no one is ever excused from this?
- 2) Or is it obligatory for him to follow for example "*Al-Tuhfah*" (i.e. *Tuhfatul Muhtaaj Sharhul Minhaaj* by Ibn Hajar al-Haithami as-Shafee'i; a book of *fiqh* where only scholarly verdicts are given, without generally mentioning the proofs from Quraan and *Sunnah*)?

So you must know that the later scholar and their leaders like Ibn Al-Qayyim indeed rejected this (i.e. point no. 2) forcefully. They said that this amounts to distorting the religion of Allah, and argued at length upon this point with evidences from Allah's clear Book and the clear sayings of the Prophet *صلي الله عليه وسلم*, clear for one whose heart Allah has Enlightened. And the ones who think that it is permissible or obligatory have only used weak doubts as evidence.

However their biggest doubt is that we are not ones fit for this (i.e. point no. 1), that we do not have the capability to do it, that only the *mujtahid* can have the capability to do so, and that **"We found our fathers following a certain way and religion, and we guide ourselves by their footsteps."** (43:22).

The scholars have written so much to refute this doubt that requires a volume (to compile). The most clear of this is what Allah has said: "They (Jews and Christians) took their rabbis and their monks to be their lords besides Allah". (9:31) Indeed Allah's Messenger *صلي الله عليه وسلم* in the hadith of 'Adi [Once while Allāh's Messenger *صلي الله عليه وسلم* was reciting this Verse, 'Adi bin Hatim said, "O Allah's Messenger! They do not worship them (i.e. the rabbis and monks)." He replied: "They certainly do. They (i.e. the rabbis and monks) made lawful things as unlawful and unlawful things as lawful, and they (i.e. Jews and Christians) followed them; and by doing so, they really worshipped them. (Narrated by Ahmad, At-Tirmidhi, and Ibn Jarir)] explained this verse in such a way that it matches exactly with that which you are upon today in both *Usool* and *Furoo'* (i.e. fundamentals and subsidiary

matters of religion). I don't find the Jews and Christians to be ahead of you in this by even a grain.

This just shows the truth of the saying of the Prophet *صلي الله عليه وسلم* "You will follow the path of those who came before you... like the fins of an arrow which are aligned together"(Mustadrak Al-Hakim). This is how the explainers (of the Quraan) explained it (verse 9:31) and I don't find any difference between them in this.

The best of this is what Abu Al-'Aaliyah said about this verse, "*Indeed they (Jews and Christians) would not have (directly) worshipped them (i.e. rabbis and monks), and even if they had ordered them to do so, they would not have obeyed them. Instead they had the Book of Allah and (despite it) they said 'We will not add anything to what our scholars said. What they commanded us to do, we will do it and what they stopped us from, we will stop from it'.*"

This letter cannot afford to contain all evidence and counter evidence, but I only wish to present on this issue what is justice and a desire to follow the truth from myself. However, if you require a balanced and detailed refutation then Ibn Fairouz has a copy of Imam Ibn Al-Qayyim's *A'laam Al-Muwaqqi'een*. In that book Ibn Al-Qayyim has discussed the matter in great detail, and he mentioned in the book (all) the doubts of your *Imams* that neither you nor your forefathers know! He refuted these doubts with clear and decisive proofs.

From these proofs is that Allah and His Messenger *صلي الله عليه وسلم* spoke about this matter exactly as your case and that the Messenger *صلي الله عليه وسلم* and his companions described it before it even occurred and warned the people about it. And that Islam will become strange, with a few people truly following it (as in various *ahadith*), and you know that when 'Amr Bin 'Abasa asked about the beginning of Islam, the Prophet *صلي الله عليه وسلم* said "A free man and a slave" i.e. Abu Bakr and Bilal. So when Islam will become once again as it began, then how ignorant is the one who takes the great number of people and their gathering as proof for truthfulness and correctness?

This and similar doubts are great (proofs) in the sight of the holders of such doubts and insignificant in the Sight of Allah and in the sight of the knowledgeable among His Creation, as Allah said: "**Nay, but they say the like of what the men of old said**" (23:81).

So, I don't know of something you use as a proof, except that Allah has Mentioned in the Quraan that the unbelievers used exactly the same proofs to deny

the messengers, like flocking of the people, following the leaders etc. So, whoever Allah has Blessed with knowledge of religion that the Prophet صلي الله عليه وسلم called to, knows the value of these verses and proofs (which we mentioned earlier) and people's need for them.

And if you claim that what these *Imams* said (about following the Quraan and *Sunnah*) is only for those who are fit for it (that is *mujtahideen*), then (I would say that) these *Imams* clearly said that it is obligatory (to seek knowledge of Quraan and *Sunnah* and follow it, as in point no. 1) upon every body, black or white, male or female, and that whatever is other than the truth (*Al-Haq*) is error, and that saying, "It is difficult (to seek knowledge of Quraan and *Sunnah* and follow it, as in point no. 1)" is a plot from the plots of *Shaytaan* to keep people from following the straight path, the monotheistic religion of Ibrahim. And now if it becomes apparent to you that these *Imams* were mistaken, then make the truth clear for me so that I may accept it!

I only wrote this to be free from guilt in front of Allah (7:164) and to call towards Him so that I may obtain the reward of callers towards Allah. However I expect that you people will not accept what I have said, as this in your eyes is the greatest wrong, so much so that whoever criticizes this behavior of yours (i.e. turning away from the Quraan and *Sunnah*) is as if he has criticized the Prophet صلي الله عليه وسلم and his companions.

However, I believe you yourself are blessed with obedience of Allah and hence it is not unlikely that Allah may Guide you towards the straight path and Open your heart to Islam. When you read this letter, if your heart rejects it, then there is nothing strange in that; he who was saved (from misguidance), it is strange how he was saved!

So if that happens, then (pray to Him with) utmost humility in front of Allah, especially at times when prayers are answered like in the last part of the night, after *Salaah*, after *Aathaan* and with supplications that the Prophet صلي الله عليه وسلم used to supplicate with, especially the one in *Sahih Muslim* that he used to say "O Allah, Lord of Jibraa'eel, Meeka'eel and Israafeel, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, Knower of the unseen and the seen; You decide amongst your slaves concerning their differences.

Guide me with Your Permission in the divergent views (which the people) hold about the truth, for it is you Who Guides whom You Will to the straight path." You must be extremely humble when making this *Du'aa* in front of the One

Who Responds to the distressed, when He calls upon Him (27:62) and the One Who Guided Ibrahim despite the opposition of all the people.

Say “O Teacher of Ibrahim, Teach me.” And if the opposition of people is a difficult matter for you, then think about what Allah said, “ **Then We have put you on a (plain) way of (Our) commandment. So follow it, and follow not the desires of those who do not know. Verily, they can avail you nothing against Allah**” (45:18-19) and “**And if you obey most of those on the earth, they will mislead you away from Allah's path.**” (6:116).

And think also about the saying of the Prophet *صلي الله عليه وسلم* in *Sahih Muslim* that he said “*Islam initiated as something strange, and it would revert to its (old position) of being strange*”. Also look at the *Hadith* in *Sahih Al-Bukhari* “Allah does not take away the knowledge, by taking it away from (the hearts of) the people, but takes it away by the death of the religious learned men till when none of the (religious learned men) remains, people will take as their leaders ignorant persons who when consulted will give their verdict without knowledge.

So they will go astray and will lead the people astray.” And also look at the *Hadith* that “*You must follow my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the rightly guided caliphs after me*” (Abu Dawood, Tirmidhi) and “*Beware of newly invented matters (in religion), because every Bid'ah is an innovation*” (as-Sunnah by Ibn Abi 'Aasim). And the *ahadith* and verses of the Quraan in this regard are many, which have been written down in separate books.

So I love you and indeed I prayed to Allah for you in my prayer and by virtue of these letters I hope that Allah will Guide you towards his right religion. Nothing stopped me from (being disappointed with) your letter, except my belief that you will not accept and follow the way of the majority. However, none can stop what Allah Gives, and nothing is too great for Him to Give. How good it would be if you could become the *Farooq* for Allah's religion in these times, like 'Umar *رضي الله عنه* in the earlier days of Islam. If you were with us, we could together reject those who have been harsh against us.

As for this Satanic thought by which *Shaytaan* hunts people, that “*who follows this way, sets himself up to make ijtihaad and leaves following the knowledgeable people*”, then *Shaytaan* adorns this thought by various decorations, which is not too great from him, as Allah says “**And so We have appointed for every Prophet enemies – Shaytaans (devils) among mankind and jinn, inspiring one another with adorned speech as a delusion (or by way of deception).**” (6:112).

What I am upon and call you towards is in reality following the people of knowledge, because they themselves advised people to do so. And the one who is most well known to do so is your own *Imam*, i.e. ash-Shaafa'i. He said "It is a must that you will find from me something that opposes the *hadith*. So whatever (of my speech) opposes it, then I take you as witnesses that I have indeed taken it back".

So, I am not alone in my opposing this scholar. Hence, suppose that I and ash-Shaafa'i differ in something e.g. in the issue of urine of those animals whose meat is permissible to eat. If I say that the saying (of ash-Shaafa'i) that their urine is impure opposes two *ahadith* (both in *Sahih Al-Bukhari*), then this ignorant, cruel person says, "Are you more knowledgeable of the *hadith* than ash-Shaafa'i?"

Then I will say that I don't oppose ash-Shaafa'i without following an *Imam* in this. Instead I have followed one who is at least like ash-Shaafa'i or more knowledgeable than him, who opposed him and used the (afore mentioned) *ahadith* as his evidence. So, when he says "Are you more knowledgeable than ash-Shaafa'i?" I will say "Are you more knowledgeable than Ahmed and Maalik?"

So, I will use his own argument against him, and the *hadith* will remain undisputable. In doing this I followed Allah's saying: "if you differ in anything amongst yourselves, refer it to Allah and the Messenger" (4:59). I follow that scholar in this issue who follows the evidence (from Quraan and *Sunnah*). I don't derive rulings from Quraan and *Sunnah* by myself until it is clear upon me what the scholars have already said (in an issue).

All this (that I have said so far) is to suppose (that you indeed follow one of these *Imams*). Instead, in reality you obey only Ibn Hajar (Al-Haithami) and do not attach any importance to whoever opposes him, whether a prophet, or a companion or a follower of a successor or even ash-Shaafa'i himself. You don't give any weight to a saying from ash-Shaafa'i if it opposes Ibn Hajar (Al-Haithami)'s saying. And similarly people other than you (i.e. you Shaafa'i's) only follow some later scholars, not the *Imams*. So, these *Hanbalis* are the people with the least amount of innovations. Most of *Al-Iqnaa'* and *Al-Muntahaa* (books of *Hanbali fiqh*) is at variance to the *madhab* of Ahmad and his sayings, those who know it, know it.

There is no difference between us that if scholar agree upon something (there is *ijmaa'*) then they must be followed. But, the difference between us is when the scholars differ, then is it obligatory upon me to accept the truth from whoever brings it and to refer the issue to Allah and His Prophet *صلي الله عليه وسلم* (i.e. proofs from Quraan and *Sunnah*) which is (actually) following the scholars? Or should I bigoted stick to one of the scholars without any proof and think that the correct

opinion is his? So you are on this second condition and this is what Allah has condemned and called *Shirk* and this is taking scholar as lords besides Allah (9:31).

Whereas, I am on the first; I call to it and debate for this. So if truth is with you, we will submit to it and accept it from you. If you want to read *A'laam ul Muwaqqi'een*, then do read the *Munaazara* (debate) that he has mentioned between the *Muqallid* and the person following proofs from Quraan and Sunnah (*Sahib ul Hujjah*).

If it occurs to you that Ibn Al-Qayyim is an innovator and that the verses of Quraan he used as evidence have other meanings, then call upon Allah with utmost humility to Guide you in the divergent view that people hold in the truth, regardless of who is saying it and seek out the sayings of the scholars of Ibn Al-Qayyim's era, like adh-Dhahabi, Ibn Katheer, Ibn Rajab etc (i.e. all say the same thing). adh-Dhahabi, may Allah have Mercy upon him is reported to have said: Knowledge is "Allah said", "His Messenger said" and "companion said", no dispute in that Knowledge is not your foolish comparison between the Messenger and the opinion of a Faqih