

The Delusional Salafi

Mohamed Ghlian / August 28, 2011



I have a question that I still can't find the answer to. Since when did 1400 years of traditional Islamic scholarship, with a countless number of traditional Muslim scholars coming from as far east as China, and going as far west as Andalusia, have been reduced to 7 individuals? I'm speaking from a personal experience right now, and after having traveled to several cities and discussed this matter with people from literally all over the globe, I've realized that my experience may not be so personal after all. As I sit through the sermon on Fridays, the imam cannot mention the commentaries on Quran and prophetic tradition of anyone else but Imama Ibn Taymiyyah, Imam Ibn Katheer, Imam Ibn Al Qayyiem, Shaykh Ibn Uthaymeen, Shaykh Bin Baz, and Shaykh Al Albani may God have mercy on all of them. There is literally no one else to be mentioned. Moreover, Since Imam Ibn Katheer and Imam Ibn Al Qayyiem were the students of Imam Ibn Taymiyyah, and they spent their lives for the most part after his passing basically reiterating what he said and mostly defending his positions on the issues he dealt with, one can take it down from 7 individuals to just 4. Here is another interesting bit as well; these 4 are all Hanbali scholars. What's puzzling is the claim that the imam constantly makes, as well as those who follow suit in the path he's on, that they're on the way of the *salaf*, i.e. the pious predecessors. The talk is always about the saying of the Prophet peace be upon him as narrated in many of the Hadith books, including *Musnad Imam Ahmed* and others:

خير الاقرون قرني ثم الذين يلولونهم ثم الذين يلولونهم

The question that begs itself is this: if these people who claim that they are on the way of the *salaf* are indeed true in their claim, why are the scholars they always mention when they speak or preach **NOT** from the *salaf*? The oldest one of them, Imam Ibn Taymiyyah, is from the 7th Islamic century. Shaykh Ibn Uthaymeen, Shaykh Bin Bazz, and Shaykh Al Albani are all from within this century.

So now there are two common themes amongst these scholars to be taken note of; none of them are from the *salaf*, and they're all from the Hanbali School. Interestingly enough, if you were to look into the books from the Islamic tradition that examine comparative jurisprudence (*Al Fiqh Al Muqaran*), you will find that up until around the 6th century there was not a recognized Hanbali School the way the Hanafi, Maliki, and Shafi'i Schools were. These older books only mention the opinions of the latter three schools and there is no mention of a Hanbali opinion. Reason for that is two folds: Imam Ahmed, although being an amazing scholar in many of the Islamic sciences and **from** the *salaf*, was mainly grouped with the scholars of Hadith; secondly, Imam Ahmed's initial students did not do as the other three imams' students had done, namely serve the school by authoring and spreading its teachings and opinions. In fact, it wasn't until the 6th Islamic century that the Hanbali School really became a *widely* recognized 4th school of Islamic jurisprudence, which is generally attributed to be due to the efforts of Ibn Qudama Al Maqdisi may God have mercy on him, who served it like no other Hanbali scholar, especially with his authored work *Al Mughni*. Remarkably, even if you look nowadays, the Hanbali School has always had the smallest number of followers, who mainly come from the Arabian Peninsula with a few coming from the area around Syria as well.

I suddenly feel the need to clarify something before I continue writing here. This is not an attack on the Hanbali School, and it's not an attack on any of the scholars I've mentioned. I'm strictly a student that holds nothing on par with any of these great people. It's simply a questioning of the methodology being followed by some modern day followers of these scholars, who for some reason feel it is an obligation upon themselves to shove down the throats of every Muslim in their path their own brand of Islam, which they deem the most correct.

So back to what I was saying, we have 4 scholars, none of which are from the *salaf*, all of which are from the Hanbali School, representing a minority among Muslim scholars, and somehow they're the bringers of "true" Islam to life. It would seem that before the 7th Islamic century and the advent of Imam Ibn Taymiyyah, the whole Muslim global community was in darkness and he was the "only" shining light that came to save it. Then after him the whole Muslim global community went into darkness again until Shaykh Bin Bazz, Shaykh Ibn Uthaymeen, and Shaykh Al Albani showed up as the new "only" shining lights coming once again to save the Muslims from wandering in darkness with their stupidity and ignorance due to other misguided scholars. Here is a thought, this type of attitude can only be described as a bad assumption of God. To assume that God will leave all of the Muslims wandering in darkness for all these periods is not only ludicrous; it's blasphemous in my estimation. Furthermore, since when did God intend for everyone to be exactly the same? Imam Malik, who is in fact **from** the *salaf*, and one of the only two imams of schools in Islamic jurisprudence (as far as I know) to have the Prophet peace be upon him foretell about in a saying (Imam Shafi'i is the other one), was asked by the Muslim ruler during his time about taking his book *Al Muwatta'* and spreading it all over the Muslim world and enforcing it upon the people to follow. His response was simply: don't do it, for knowledge has spread around and people know different things and they've been acting

upon different realities (which all conform to Islamic teachings anyways). Here is a *salafi* imam doing the exact opposite of what of these modern day so-called *salafi* Muslims do.

Then there is the claim to be bringing people back to the truth and fixing the wrong and fighting innovation, all to purify Islam from all the ignorance that has taken it over:

“ Akhee, we want to be on the true path of Allah and it's as Shaykh Al Islam Ibn Taymiyyah said this and that, and as the saying of the Prophet PBUH that was authenticated by Shaykh Al Albani says, which is why Shaykh Ibn Uthaymeen said...

It's a very interesting claim indeed to make. Why don't these people reflect on the verse from the Quran that says:

And when it is said to them, Do not make mischief in the land, they say: we are but peace-makers. Now surely they themselves are the mischief makers, but they do not perceive – Al Baqara (2:11-12)

وإذا قيل لهم لا تفسدوا في الأرض قالوا إنما نحن مصلحون 11/ألا نهم هم المفسدون ولكن لا يشعرون 12- البقرة 12-11

Imam Al Qurtubi mentions towards the end of his commentary on these verses in his *Al Jami' Li Ah'kam Al Qur'an*:

“ These people claiming to be fixing the conditions are only assuming so, while in reality they're sowing corruption. Furthermore, the people of meaning say: "whoever makes a claim has lied", which is true.

So the lesson here is to not make a claim for that is the first sign of one's delusion.

The true practical test of Islam being a religion of truth is not restricted in one's appearance and most definitely not in how intense they are in their devotional activities. It's in how Islam is reflected in their lives and character. If Islam is truly the path of truth, and as some of these so-called *salafi* Muslims claim it to be "The Solution" to mankind's problems, then what they offer has to be much better than any other way of living. Their character would be the best of character, and how they carry themselves in this world should on its own be a testament and attract people to want to be like them. They don't even need to preach Islam using their tongues because it would be drowned by how loud their actions are being. A historical example of that is in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, where they have the greatest concentration of Muslims. Muslim merchants, mainly from Yemen, through their travels were the main cause behind the mass conversion of people in those lands to Islam, and the single most commonly cited reason was due to the character of these Muslim merchants and how they carried themselves. From my own personal observation, the majority of so-called *salafis* that I've come across have reduced Islam to an intellectual discourse, where they try to intellectually convince

others. I can't really say I'm surprised, because when it comes to the character and personal conduct and interaction department, most of those so-called *salafis* are quite bankrupt.

Quick pause, I'm not speaking about general masses and I'm definitely **not** saying that all these so-called *salafis* are the way I describe. I've met some wonderful individuals that ascribe themselves to wanting to follow the way of the *salaf*. I am saying that from my own personal interactions and travels the majority are in fact the way I'm putting it here.

What has this resulted in when it comes to the community at large is a testimony to the bankruptcy of the methodology these so-called *salafis* follow. One of their telltale signs is their emphasis on following the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH directly. *While this sounds good on the surface, it's an emotional plea that has no intellectual foundation.* They feel that it's the duty of every Muslim to investigate and look into every little detail about everything when it comes to Islamic teachings. As I heard one of them once say:

“ *We're all intelligent people here studying in university in the most difficult fields, and we can read the books and discern things for ourselves*

This has resulted in what many of the Muslim scholars today call “*al fawda ad'deeyya*”, (الفوضى الدينية), i.e. religious chaos. Even if we assume that every single Muslim out there is well versed in the Islamic sciences to the level of the great scholars of the past, they will still not arrive at similar conclusions from reading the same texts. How can they not, when aside from having different intellectual aptitudes, they also come from different backgrounds and cultures, as well as have different experiences growing up. To give a simple example, someone growing up as a single child will have a very different worldview and experience than another that grew up in a large family and another who had only sisters or brothers for siblings. While there are certain rigorous requirements and rules guiding how the tradition is approached, the simple possession of the tools is not a guarantee of arriving to the same conclusions on certain matters. If anyone thinks otherwise they can only be described as delusional. Need proof? Look at the great Imams in the Islamic tradition who have the 4 jurisprudential schools named after them; Abu Hanifa, Malik, Shafi'i, and Ibn Hanbal. They all achieved the highest level attainable in Islamic scholarship, and yet they arrived to different positions and disagreed in many of their religious rulings. Not only that, scholars from within each school had their own disagreements. In fact, Al Azhar scholars from Egypt went through and counted the number of jurisprudential rulings where there are differences in opinion amongst the scholars, and the final tally was one million two hundred thousand issues (1,200,000)!

What does this mean? It means that you can almost guarantee yourself, outside of clear-cut matters that are not open to any interpretation, if you think a certain matter is settled in jurisprudence, you're simply ignorant of other opinions. The problem arises when you believe that what you think is the only way and the only right one. Since the so-called *salafis* assume that everyone can just look through the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH directly, without the need to refer to scholars, everyone in the community becomes the boss of themselves. The result of this is the constant argumentation about religious issues amongst Muslims, and sometimes fights that take place in the mosques because while one person thinks the ruling on a certain matter is one way, the other disagrees since they see it a different way, and it all becomes an ego trip. This eventually reflects in poor character

and manners as everyone feels they're an authority onto everyone else. As [Dr. Umar Faruq Abd-Allah](#) had put it during the [2011 Deen Intensive Rihla](#) in Turkey:

“ The crisis of the Muslim community is a crisis of *adab*, i.e. a crisis of character and manners

Don't get me wrong here. I don't have a problem with following the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH. The issue I have is: based on whose understanding? Based on yours? Based on mine? I don't have the tools to approach the tradition and arrive to sound conclusions on my own, so I'll constantly go back and refer to scholars and see what they said. Unlike the modern day so-called *salafis* I don't rely on a single individual scholar or only a handful of them *no matter how scholarly they are*. I take after a full school that is 1300 years old, which started with an actual *salafi* imam, and has had that many years of formation and examination by a countless number of scholars, which got it to arrive to the rulings in jurisprudence that it has nowadays. I'm not a Hanbali, so what these so-called *salafis* have to offer when it comes to jurisprudence – with what Imam Ibn Taymiyyah or Shaykh Ibn Uthaymeen or Shaykh Al Albani said – is none of my interests. Some of them may not like hearing this, but on certain issues, where they use the Qur'an and Hadith of the Prophet peace be upon him, and believe in their heart of hearts that it's the majority opinion, it may be in fact the minority opinion because of other Qur'anic verses or other Hadiths they may not be aware of. Just because the Hanbalis have a ruling that is one way does **NOT** mean that it's the only way. Islam is much bigger than this.

So here is an interesting fact to the so-called *salafi*; the way the Prophet peace be upon him used to recite the Quran was not how the great majority of Muslims recite it today. The most common recitation style heard today, including in Mecca and Medina is the recitation of *Hafs from Asim*. However, the recitation of the Prophet peace be upon him was similar to what is known as the recitation of *Warsh from Nafi'*. The accent of the tribe of Quraysh did not have the "hamza" letter when it came in the middle of the word. For example, they would say "moomin – "مؤمن" not "mo'min – "مؤمن" (believer). The styles of recitation were revealed for a couple of purposes. One is to encompass all possible rhetorical meanings in verses, which add to its miraculous nature. But the other was to accommodate the tribes in the Arabian Peninsula who did not pronounce words the same way the Quraysh tribe did. Furthermore, Imam Ahmed Ibn Hanbal was asked by his son Abdullah about which recitation he preferred, and he said *Nafi'* because it was the language of Quraysh, but if not, then *Asim* would be the second choice. Imam Malik went further than that and considered the recitation of *Nafi'* to be a sunnah because that's how the Prophet peace be upon him recited Quran most of the time. Nowadays, the accommodation became the established basis that everyone recites in, and the foundation became the accommodation. My question to the so-called *salafi* is this: if your recitation of the Quran doesn't even conform to how the Prophet PBUH recited, what else are you doing that you think is how the Prophet PBUH did it all the time, yet it was something he PBUH only did sometimes.

One final pause for those who think I'm lowering the status of a recitation of the Quran. That is not my intention here. I'm just making a point that the Beloved peace be upon him recited most of the time in one style and only sometimes in the others. If the so-called *salafi* truly wants to emulate the Prophet peace be upon him as he was in most of what he did, why don't they start with the Quran? I say this because I've yet to meet one so-called *salafi* who recites in any other recitation other than *Hafs from*

Asim. Many don't even know how the *Warsh* recitation even sounds like let alone be able to do it themselves.

Typically, and this is my own conclusions to this matter here, those who spend their time trying to get everyone to do things their way are doing so out of insecurity. It's quite understandable as it is part of human nature to seek approval, and one of the ways to do so is by having others conform to what one does. It's much more comfortable to walk around dressed in a certain way if everyone else is dressed similarly, because otherwise it looks odd. However, those without insecurity issues don't seem to bother much with what others might think of them. They do not need anyone else to see things the way they do if they truly believe with conviction that they're right. They might discuss it with others and present arguments for their vision in trying to convince them to see it in their way. But they definitely will not shove it down anyone's throat the way some of the modern day overzealous so-called *salafi* Muslims do. It's narrated that a man came to Imam Malik and was trying to argue about a certain matter. Imam Malik quickly responded with:

“ As for me, I'm in a state of certainty from my Lord about what I'm doing. As for you, you're in doubt, so go find someone else in doubt like yourself to argue with

So all in all, may God have mercy on the souls of Imam Ibn Taymiyya, Shaykh Bin Baz, Shaykh Ibn Uthaymeen, and Shaykh Al Albani, and elevate their status for serving the Hanbali School. But to the so-called *salafi* is a quick reminder: I'm **not** a Hanbali *and so are not most Muslims*, these great scholars are not from the *salaf* that the Prophet peace be upon him talked about in the Hadith (even though they tried their best to walk in the *salaf*'s path) despite how high of a status they achieved in knowledge and piety, and you most certainly need to let go of trying to make everyone else like you.

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