

# **The Sayings of the Imams Concerning Following the Sunnah and Abandoning Their Sayings when They Oppose the Sunnah—and the Dispraise of Taqleed**

All praise is due to Allāh, the Lord of all creation—may He extol the mention of the Prophet in the Highest company and send His peace upon him, his family and Companions. To proceed:

Much of the following discussion regarding blind-following (*taqleed*) has been extracted, edited and adapted from one of the early chapters of the wonderful work of *al-Imām, al-Muhaddith, al-Mujaddid*, Muhammad Nāsir ad-Deen Al-Albānī (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) entitled *Sifat as-Salātin-Nabiyy* (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) published in 1370 AH (1951 CE). The title of chapter is: **The Sayings of the Imams Concerning Following the Sunnah and Abandoning Their Sayings when They Oppose the Sunnah**. So may Allāh (سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى) have mercy on this noble scholar and guide this Ummah to follow the Shari‘ah proofs and leave to one side the mistaken opinions of men when the truth is made clear to them.

The *Madhhab* or methodology of the *Muhadditheen*, who were the great scholars of *Hadīth* of this Ummah, was to establish their positions and rulings in Religion based on the Book of Allāh (تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى) and Sunnah of the Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ). This is the way of the scholars of Sunnah, past and present. It is not correct to call

people to blindly follow the *Madhhabs* and the opinions of scholars without their proofs. How excellent is the saying of the one who said:

أَهْلُ الْحَدِيثِ هُمْ أَهْلُ النَّبِيِّ وَإِنْ  
لَمْ يَصْحَبُوا نَفْسَهُ أَنْفَاسُهُ صَحَبُوا

**“Ahlul-Hadīth are the people of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), even though they did not accompany him, his every breath (word) they accompany.”<sup>1</sup>**

It is of benefit to mention the sayings of the great scholars of the Salaf in this matter as an admonition and reminder to those who blindly follow the *Imāms* of the *Madhhabs*, or even blindly follow those who are by far lesser than the Imams – and they hold fast to their *madhhabs* and the sayings of their *madhhabs* as if it was revelation sent down from the Heavens, while Allāh (the Most High) stated:

اتَّبِعُوا مَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ قَلِيلًا مَا  
تَذَكَّرُونَ

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<sup>1</sup> Reference: From the poem of Al-Hasan bin Muhammad an-Nasawi, as narrated by Al-Hāfidh Diyā ad-Deen al-Maqdisi in a treatise entitled, *Fadlul-Hadīth wa Ahlihi*.

**“Follow what has been sent down to you from your Lord, and do not follow other than from friends and protectors. Little is that you take the reminder.” (Al-A‘rāf: 3)**

And He (سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى) said:

وَمَا كَانَ لِمُؤْمِنٍ وَلَا مُؤْمِنَةٍ إِذَا قَضَى اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ أَمْرًا أَنْ يَكُونَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ  
مِنْ أَمْرِهِمْ ۗ وَمَنْ يَعِصِ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا مُبِينًا

**“It is not for a believer, man or woman, when Allāh and His Messenger have decreed a matter that they should have any option in their decision. And whoever disobeys Allāh and His Messenger, he has indeed strayed into a plain error.” (Al-Ahzāb 33:36).**

He (تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى) also says:

قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِ

**“Say to them, O Prophet, ‘If you truly love Allāh, then follow me.’” (Surah Aal- ‘Imrān 3:31).**

يُحِبِّبْكُمْ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

**“Allāh will love you and forgive you your sins, and Allāh is oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.” (Āli ‘Imrān 3:31).**

## Part 1. Imām Abu Hanīfah (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ)

The first of the four Imāms was Abu Hanifah an-Nu‘mān ibn Thābit (died 150 AH, Allāh’s mercy be upon him). His students narrated from him numerous sayings with different wordings on this topic, all of them showing the obligation of taking knowledge from the *Hadīth*, and to abandon the *Taqleed* or blind-following of the opinions of the Imāms and scholars that oppose the *Ahādeeth*:

ONE: Abu Hanīfah (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) said:

إِذَا صَحَّ الْحَدِيثُ فَهُوَ مَذْهَبِي

**“If a *Hadīth* is shown to be authentic, then that is my *Madhhab*.”<sup>2</sup>**

Ibn ‘Ābideen quotes from *Sharh al-Hidāyah* of Ibn ash-Shahnah al-Kabeer, the Shaikh of Ibn al-Humām as follows: “If a *Hadīth* is found to be authentic and it contradicts the *Madhhab*, then acting upon the *Hadīth* should be his *Madhhab*. The follower of the *Madhhab* is not expelled from being a *Hanafi* by acting upon the *Hadīth*. It is authentically reported from Abu Hanīfah that he said: **‘If a *Hadīth* is found to be *sahīh*, then that is my *madhhab*.’** Ibn ‘Abdul-Barr related this from Abu Hanīfah and other Imāms also.”

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<sup>2</sup> Ibn ‘Ābideen in *Al-Hāshiyah* (1/63), also in his treatise *Rasm al-Mufti* (1/3) from *Majmoo‘ah ar-Rasā’il* of Ibn ‘Ābideen; Shaikh Sālih al-Fulāni in *Īqāz al-Himam* (p. 62), and others.

*Al-Imām Al-Albānī (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ)* commented: “I say: This is from the completeness of their knowledge and their *Taqwā* of Allāh because they understood that they could not encompass the whole of the Sunnah—Imām ash-Shāfi‘ī stated that clearly, as we shall see later in this discussion. And it happened that they would contradict the Sunnah [sometimes] because it did not reach them. So, they commanded us with clinging to the Sunnah—and they made that their *Madhhab*, may Allāh’s mercy be upon them all.”<sup>3</sup>

**TWO:** Imām Abu Hanīfah said:

لَا يَحِلُّ لِأَحَدٍ أَنْ يَأْخُذَ بِقَوْلِنَا مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ مِنْ أَيْنَ أَخَذْنَاهُ

**“It is not permitted for anyone to take our saying without knowing where we took it from.”<sup>4</sup>**

In a narration, he (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) said:

حَرَامٌ عَلَى مَنْ لَمْ يَعْرِفْ دَلِيلِي أَنْ يُفْتِيَ بِكَلَامِي

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<sup>3</sup> See *Sifatus-Salāh* of Shaikh al-Albānī, pp. 41-42.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn ‘Abdul-Barr (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) in *al-Intiqā’ Fī Fadā’il al-A’immah al-Fuqahā’* (p. 145), Ibn al-Qayyim in *I’lām al-Muwaqqi’in* (2/309), Ibn ‘Ābideen in his commentary on *al-Bahr ar-Rā’iq* (6/293) and in *Rasm al-Muftī* (pp. 29, 32), ash-Sha‘rānī in *al-Mizān* (1/55) along with the second narration. The third saying was reported by ‘Abbās ad-Dawri in *at-Tāreekh* of Ibn Ma‘een (6/77/1) with an a *sahīh* chain of narration to Zafar (Abu Hanīfah’s student).

**“It is *harām* for the one who does not know my evidence to give a *fatwā* based on my speech.”**

He (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) added in a wording:

فَاتَّنا بَشْرَ نَقُولَ الْقَوْلَ الْيَوْمَ وَنَرْجِعُ عَنْهُ غَدًا

**“For, indeed we are men—we may say something today, and we take it back tomorrow.”**

Al-‘Allāmah Al-Albāni (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) commented: “If this was the speech of the Imāms concerning the one who does not know their proofs—then I wonder, what would the Imāms say about the person who knows that the proofs oppose their views, yet they still give *fatwa* that contradict the proofs?! So reflect on this speech because it is enough on its own to demolish the blind-following of opinions (*at-taqleed al-a‘mā*)! For this reason, one of the blind-following shaikhs denied the attribution of these saying to Abu Hanīfah when I rebuked him for issuing *fatwas* according to the sayings of Abu Hanīfah without knowing his proofs!”<sup>5</sup>

In another narration, Abu Hanīfah, said:

وَيَحَلْكَ يَا يَعْقُوبُ! - وَهُوَ أَبُو يُوسُفَ - لَا تَكْتُبُ كُلَّ مَا تَسْمَعُ مِنِّي فَإِنِّي قَدْ أَرَى الرَّأْيَ الْيَوْمَ وَأَثْرُكُهُ غَدًا وَأَرَى الرَّأْيَ غَدًا وَأَثْرُكُهُ بَعْدَ غَدٍ.

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<sup>5</sup> See *Sifatus-Salāh* of Shaikh al-Albāni, p. 42.

**“Woe to you, O Ya‘qoob<sup>6</sup>, do not write down everything that you hear from me! For indeed, I may hold an opinion today that I abandon tomorrow—and I may hold an opinion tomorrow that I abandon the day after tomorrow.”<sup>7</sup>**

Shaikh Al-Albāni (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) said about this: “That is because many of the sayings of Imām Abu Hanīfah were based on Qiyās (analogical reasoning), then there would occur to him an even stronger analogy, or a *Hadīth* of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) would reach him—so he would take that and abandon his previous view.”

Ash-Sha‘rāni said: “Our belief and the belief of every just person concerning *al-Imām* Abu Hanīfah (may Allāh be pleased with him) is that if he had lived until time of the compilation of the Islamic Law (the Shari‘ah), and [until] after the journeying of the preservers (*al-Huffādh*) of *Hadīth* to the various lands and frontiers to gathering the Prophetic narrations and being successful in that, then he would have taken to that and accepted it, and he would have abandoned all of the Qiyās that he had resorted to—and thereafter, Qiyās in his *Madhhab* would have been as scarce as it is in the other

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<sup>6</sup> Referring to his student, Abu Yūsuf (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ).

<sup>7</sup> Similar narrations have been reported from the students of Abu Hanīfah (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) such as Zafar, Abu Yusuf and ‘Āfiyah ibn Yazeed as cited in *Īqāz al-Himam* (p. 52)—and Ibn al-Qayyim asserted its authenticity as the speech of Abu Yusuf in *I‘lām al-Muwaqqi‘īn* (2/344). This additional narration is found in the annotations to *Īqāz al-Himam* (p. 65) as citations from Ibn ‘Abdul-Barr, Ibn al-Qayyim and others.

*Madhhabs*. However, the Shari‘ah proofs (i.e., the *hadīth*) were scattered in his time among the *Tābi‘een* and the *Tābi‘ at-Tābi‘een* (scholars of the second and third generations) throughout the cities, villages and frontiers, so Qiyās was understandably more prevalent in his *Madhhab* as compared to the other *Madhhabs* by necessity—and was due to the absence of having access to the texts (the *Ahādīth*) in those matters where he had to [therefore] rely on analogical reasoning unlike the other Imāms. The scholars of *Hadīth* (the *Huffādh*) embarked upon journeys in their times, seeking the Prophetic Narrations and gathering them from the towns and villages, and then writing them into books—thus, some of the *Ahādīth* of the *Shari‘ah* would explain other *Ahādīth*. So, this explains why there is more Qiyās to found in the *Madhhab* of Abu Hanīfah, and far less in the other *Madhhabs*.”<sup>8</sup>

Al-‘Allāmah Al-Albāni (رحمته الله) said: “So if this excuse is extended to Abu Hanīfah in that which he fell into of contradicting the authentic *Ahādīth* [of Allāh’s Messenger ﷺ] unintentionally, then that excuse is accepted without question because Allāh does not burden a soul more than it can bear. So, it is not permissible to revile him as some of the ignorant people do. Rather, it is obligatory to treat him with good manners because he was an Imām among

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<sup>8</sup> Ash-Sha‘rāni in *al-Meezān* (1/62), summarised. Abul-Hasanāt al-Lucknowi cited ash-Sha‘rāni’s words in full in *an-Nāfi‘ al-Kabeer* (p. 135), supporting them and offering further clarification in the footnotes, so whoever wishes can refer them.



the Imāms of the Muslims through whom the Religion is preserved and has reached us in all of its various branches—and he (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) is rewarded regardless of whether he was correct or mistaken.

Likewise, it is not permissible for those who venerate him and raise high his station to persist in clinging to his statements and views that oppose the *Ahādīth* because that was not from his *Madhhab* as you have seen from his statements. So, there are some on one extreme and others on another extreme, and the truth is between the two. And Allāh (تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى) stated:

وَالَّذِينَ جَاءُوا مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا اغْفِرْ لَنَا وَلِإِخْوَانِنَا الَّذِينَ سَبَقُونَا  
بِالْإِيمَانِ وَلَا تَجْعَلْ فِي قُلُوبِنَا غِلًّا لِلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا رَبَّنَا إِنَّكَ رَءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿١٧﴾

**And those who came after them say: ‘Our Lord! Forgive us and our brethren who have preceded us in *imān* and put not in our hearts any hatred against those who have believed. Our Lord! You are indeed full of kindness, Most Merciful.’<sup>9</sup>**

**THREE:** Abu Hanīfah (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) said:

إِذَا قُلْتُ قَوْلًا يُخَالِفُ كِتَابَ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى وَخَبَرَ الرَّسُولِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ  
فَاتْرُكُوا قَوْلِي

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<sup>9</sup> Al-Hashr 3:147.

**“If I say something that opposes the Book of Allāh, the Most High, or opposes a narration of Allāh’s Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم), then leave off my saying.”<sup>10</sup>**

Sālih al-Fulāni also ascribed to Imām Muhammad [Ibn Hasan ash-Shaybāni], then he said: “This speech [of Abu Haīfah] is not directed at the *mujtahid* (juristic scholar) because he is not required to follow their sayings. It is, therefore, directed at the *muqallid* (the blind follower).”

Based on this, ash-Sha‘rānī<sup>11</sup> stated: “If it is said: What do I do with the *Ahādīth* that were authenticated after the death of my Imām which he did not use?

Then the answer is: It is obligatory upon you to act according to them, because if your Imām had come across these narrations and found them to be authentic, he would have surely commanded you to act upon them for all of the Imāms were captives in the hand of the Sharī‘ah—and whoever does that has grasped goodness with both of his hands!

And the one who says: ‘**I will not act upon a *Hadīth* except if my Imām acted upon it**’, then such a person has lost out on a great deal of good—as is the case with many of the blind-followers (*muqallidoon*) of the *Madhhabs*. It would be better for them to act upon every *Hadīth* that is shown to be authentic after the death of

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<sup>10</sup> Shaikh Sālih al-Fulāni in *Īqāz al-Himam* (p. 50).

<sup>11</sup> Ash-Sha‘rānī in *al-Meezān* (1/26).

their Imāms as that would be in fulfilment of the will of the Imāms. Our belief concerning the Imāms of the *Madhhab*s is that had they lived, they would have certainly accepted these *Ahādīth* that were authenticated after their deaths, taking them and acted upon them—and they would have abandoned all the analogical reasoning (*Qiyās*) that they had previously made, and abandoned all their previously held opinions [in favour of the *Ahādīth*].”

**Ibn Abil ‘Izz al-Hanafi** (d. 792 AH, رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) said: “It is obligatory to submit completely to the Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) and to yield to his commands and to accept his narrations and to truly affirm them in the hearts, without referring them to false notions and ideas that are labelled as intellect or reason. We should not be in any doubt concerning his narrations and we are not to put the opinions of men ahead of him nor the refuse of their thoughts—rather, the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) is singled out with judgement, with submission and yielding to him, just as the One (مُجِبَّانَهُ وَتَعَالَى) who sent him is singled out with all worship, humility, turning to Him in repentance, trusting and relying on Him (تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى).

Both of these aspects are considered to be *oneness*.<sup>12</sup> There is no salvation for a person from the punishment of Allāh except by clinging to both: to single out Allāh with all worship, and to single out the Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) to be followed. One does not judge

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<sup>12</sup> Meaning to single out Allāh (مُجِبَّانَهُ وَتَعَالَى) alone with sincere worship and devotion, and to single out the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) alone as the example to be followed, and to be obeyed just as Allāh (مُجِبَّانَهُ وَتَعَالَى) has commanded.

by anyone other than him, and one is not pleased by anyone else's judgement.

A Muslim is not to refrain from acting upon his commands nor withhold from believing in what he reported; nor does he compare his saying (ﷺ) to the saying of his *shaikh*, or the *imām* of his *madhhab*, his group or the one he venerates. If they approve of it, he acts upon it and accepts it; but if they do not, then—seeking safety—he entrusts the matter to them and turns away from the Messenger's (ﷺ) command and narration. Or else, he distorts the narration from its proper meaning, calling his distortion 'interpretation (*ta'weel*)' and 'understanding,' saying, 'we interpret it and understand it in this way.'<sup>13</sup>

That a person is cast into every sin—other than *Shirk* with Allāh—is better than being cast into this state. Rather, when an authentic *Hadīth* reaches him, he should regard it as though he heard it directly from the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ). Then is it permissible for him to delay accepting it and acting upon it until he compares it with the opinion, words, or *Madhhab* of so-and-so? Never!

Rather, it is obligatory upon him to hasten to comply with it, without turning to anything else. He should not find the Prophet's (ﷺ) statement problematic because it conflicts with the

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<sup>13</sup> The blind-followers do this to make the contradictory opinion found in their *Madhhab* justifiable to their followers.

view of some person; instead, he should find people’s opinions problematic when they conflict with the Prophet’s statement!

Nor should he oppose a revealed text with analogical reasoning (Qiyās); rather, we discard such analogies and accept the textual evidence.

We do not distort his words from their true meanings for the sake of some imagined construct that its proponents call ‘reason’—indeed, it is ignorance and far removed from what is right!

And we do not make acceptance of the Prophet’s (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) statement conditional upon its agreement with the view of any individual—whoever that person may be.”<sup>14</sup>

There is no example more worthy of being followed than that of Allāh’s Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ):

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ  
الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا ﴿٢١﴾

**“Indeed, in the Messenger of Allāh you have a fine example to follow for whosoever hopes in Allāh and the Last Day—and remembers Allāh much.” (Al-Ahzāb: 21)**

Allāh (تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى) stated:

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<sup>14</sup> See explanation of the ‘Aqeedah of Imām at-Tahāwī (pp. 166-167).

وَمَا آتَاكُمُ الرَّسُولُ فَخُذُوهُ وَمَا نَهَاكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهُوا<sup>ج</sup>

**“Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatever he forbids you, abstain from it.”<sup>15</sup>**

All praise is due to Allāh, the Lord of all creation—may the praise of Allāh and His peace be upon the Messenger, his family and Companions.

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<sup>15</sup> Al-Hashr 59:7