

Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah and the Foundational Principles of the Khārijite Renegades (F): Lack of Genuine, Knowledge-Based Piety

In the various works of Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah (728H) is a very insightful, detailed and elaborate analysis of the Khārijite doctrine and the underlying reasons for its appearance. The Khārijites appear to show piety in certain affairs (in which they have exaggerated) whilst neglecting numerous other obligatory affairs, leading them to a false type of piety built upon ignorance and lack of understanding. Genuine, deeply-rooted piety must be built upon abundant, sound knowledge of the Qur’ān and Sunnah, which the Khārijites do not possess. This caused them to fall into a severe, harmful innovation and for this reason the Prophet (ﷺ) rebuked them and ordered their killing whenever they appear.

Ibn Taymiyyah (رحمة الله) wrote: “This [type of] piety can lead a person to major [heretical] innovations, for the piety of the Khārijites, Rāfiḍah, Mu‘tazilah and their likes is of this type. They abstained from oppression and whatever they considered oppression such as mixing with the oppressors as they claimed, until they abandoned major obligations such as praying congregational and Friday prayers, performance of Hajj and fighting [behind the authority of the ruler], advising the Muslims and being merciful to them. The people displaying this type of piety were shown rejection by the leading scholars, such as the Four Imāms and

their condition started to be mentioned within the doctrine of Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jamā‘ah.”¹

Meaning that the Salaf did not accept this display of apparent piety. They recognised it as extremism in accordance with Prophetic traditions which state that the Companions would belittle their own prayer and fasting compared to that of the Khārijites, this being an indication of their extremism and exaggeration. These traditions indicate that this worship was just apparent, did not passing beyond their throats and was built upon ignorance. As for the Companions, their worship was built upon sound knowledge and was in moderation, which is what Islām commands. The Salaf would cast doubt on the piety of the Khārijites because they departed from the Prophetic guidance. Any display of overt piety could not be reconciled with such a deviation. Hence, Sufyān al-Thawrī (157H) when he saw one of the Khārijites, al-Ḥasan bin Ṣāliḥ bin Ḥayy, standing in prayer in the mosque he remarked: “I seek refuge from hypocritical humility.” and left.² And al-Ḥasan bin Ṣāliḥ merely held the view of the permissibility of revolt, without actually revolting himself and fighting against Muslims.

Ibn Taymiyyah also wrote: “The pious person who abstains [from wrongdoing and sin] requires a great deal of knowledge of the Book and the Sunnah and [insightful] understanding in religion.

¹ Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā (20/140).

² Al-Siyar of al-Zahabī (7/363).

Otherwise his corrupt [form of] abstinence will corrupt more than it will rectify.”³

Genuine, abundant piety stems from abundant, sound, detailed knowledge and understanding of the Qur’ān and the Sunnah. It can not be based upon ignorance. The Prophet was the most pious (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), then the Companions and they were the carriers of the Sunnah. There was not a single Companion amongst the Khārijites indicating they did not have knowledge or did not recourse to the carriers of knowledge and isolated themselves, sufficing with their own ignorance and faulty understanding. Thus, their piety and abstinence was in reality a form of corruption which led to more corruption than alleged rectification.

Ibn Taymiyyah also said: “The Wa’idiyyah from the Khārijites and others have done well in what they have venerated of the affair of sins and their prohibition and [the affair] of following the Qur’ān and its veneration. However, they erred because of their absence of following the Sunnah and [the absence] of faith in what [the Sunnah] has indicated of showing mercy to the believer if he commits a major sin.”⁴

Whilst the Khārijites and Mu’tazilah – [who claim that Allāh must implement His threats just as He fulfils His promises]⁵ – venerate

³ Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā (20/141)

⁴ Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā (20/110).

⁵ The Khārijites and Mu’tazilah erred in this because of their ignorance and faulty understanding. Whilst Allāh always fulfils His promise, He may or may not implement His threat. Implementing one’s threat is not a condition of truthfulness. Rather, Allāh may show mercy and withdraw the threat on

the affair of sins and disobedience and cautiously avoid them and attempt to follow the Qur'ān, venerating it a great deal, their misguidance stems from not judging to the authentic Sunnah in what they claim to have understood from the verses of the Qur'ān. This is the source of their misguidance and it led them to extremism and exaggeration which in turn led them to expel Muslims from Islām and raise the sword against them. The Prophet (ﷺ) warned severely against this exaggerated form of piety which leads to corruption and this helps to explain the severity with which the Khārijites are reprimanded in the Sunnah and the command to those in authority to fight them whenever they appear.

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account of certain reasons (asbāb) such as what may proceed from the servant himself of rectification or from others who may supplicate for that person or intercede for him. Or Allāh may simply show mercy and forgive, without any other means. And this is where the Khārijites and Mu'tazilah departed from the Sunnah with respect to sinful Muslims and also denied the traditions pertaining to intercession. This also establishes that they try to understand the Qur'ān by their own opinions and then reject from the Sunnah what clashes with their faulty understandings.