

Published on Al-Islam.org (https://www.al-islam.org)

<u>Home</u> > <u>A New Analysis of Wahhabi Doctrines</u> > <u>Absolute Obedience to the Ruler</u> > The ministry of Imam 'Ali ('a)

## **Absolute Obedience to the Ruler**

The Wahhabis who regard themselves as followers of Ahmad ibn Hanbal consider it obligatory {wajib} to obey one vested with authority {wali al-amr} for three reasons. They believe that the two 'id prayers, Friday and other congregational prayers and leading the Hajj and jihad are at the discretion of the leader and ruler, whether he is just, or a debauchee and oppressor, and that this theory is corroborated by the Qur'an and the Sunnah as well as the practice of the Companions.

Their first basis is the verse,

O you who have faith! Obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority among you. 1159

They say that this can be deduced from the universality and general applicability of "those vested with authority" {ulu'l-amr} that any ruler, whether he is good or bad, must be obeyed, and obeying those vested with authority does not specify whether the ruler is just or debauchee. They believe that this statement does not distinguish between the two, and it cannot be said that it means the just ruler.2

**The other basis** the Wahhabis cite is a tradition allegedly from the Prophet (s). The book, *Al-As'ilah wa'l-Ajwibah*, has assumed its alleged authenticity. The tradition thus states:

Verily, Allah affirms this religion through the debauchee (who shall rule).

It can be inferred from this tradition that any ruler who affirms the religion ought to be obeyed, but the Wahhabis have made use of it in a different way.

In another narration on the authority of Abu Hurayrah, it is thus stated:

Jihad is incumbent upon you along with the one who rules over you, whether he is good or a debauchee.

**The third basis** the Wahhabis cite is the practice of the Companions which is treated as a proof {hujjah}, such as 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud's standing in prayer behind Walid ibn 'Uqbah ibn Abi Mu'it notwithstanding the fact that Walid was a drunkard and a wicked person.3

Another example is the practice of a famous Companion, 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar who stood in prayer behind Hajjaj ibn Yusuf in spite of the fact that Hajjaj was a tyrant and bloodthirsty man. Similarly, some other Companions prayed behind Ibn Abi 'Ubaydah despite their awareness of his deviation in belief by explicitly calling on the people to misguidance.

All of these constitute the arguments of the Wahhabis in favor of the incumbency of obeying the ruler irrespective of the ruler being just or unjust. 4 This mindset actually paved the way for the rule of the debauchees, tyrants and drunkards and hinders the advancement of the righteous.

In the same token, this frame of mind is against the Qur'an, and as will be made clear later, allocation in the verses cited as evidence by the Wahhabis is stronger than lack of allocation because in understanding a verse it is necessary to take into account the entire Qur'an and other verses as well. There are numerous verses in the Qur'an which proscribe obedience to squanderers, mischief-mongers and oppressors, and these verses are explicitly connected to the verse on "those vested with authority". If we follow the mischief-mongers and oppressors, it means that we obey the sinful—an act which is repugnant to the Qur'an:

#### But do not cooperate in sin and aggression. 5163

Higher than this is the obedience to parents which is sanctioned by the Qur'an on the condition that they take a walk on the path of truth. This is while obedience to the ruler is not superior to obedience to the parents:

We have enjoined man to be good to his parents. But if they urge you to ascribe to Me as partner that of which you have no knowledge,) then do not obey them.6

The Sunnah and hadiths of the Prophet (s), also proscribe obedience to sinful people:

There is no obedience to the creature {makhluq} in disobedience to the Creator {khaliq}.7

Basically, the essence of Islam is the movement of the society on the basis of God-wariness {taqwa}:

#### Cooperate in piety and God-wariness. 8

The Qur'an also regards the establishment of justice as the raison d'être of the prophets' mission:

#### ... So that mankind may maintain justice. 9

Given all of this, how could Islam possibly approve an unjust Imam, draw the society toward corruption and injustice, and take as the criterion the practice of some of the Companions?

# The practice of the Companions {sahabah}

If it can be concluded from the practice of some Companions in following the illegitimate ruler of their time that any ruler, whether just or unjust, must be obeyed, this question is to be asked: Why did 'Abd Allah ibn 'Umar accept the caliphate of 'Uthman but deny the caliphates of Imam 'Ali and Imam al-Hasan ('a); not assist Imam al-Husayn ('a) but swear allegiance to Yazid, 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad and Hajjaj ibn Yusuf? Why did some Companions not swear allegiance to Imam 'Ali ('a)?

Therefore, the practice per se of the Companions does not serve as proof {hujjah} and their being hujjah has some requisites and conditions. Merely being a Companion {sahabi} is not enough. Both the group of hypocrites {munafiqun} and those who later became apostates {murtaddin} were included in the rubric of "Companions", and the hadiths narrated by them are also unacceptable.

Unfortunately, since this mindset has taken root in the school of thought of some Sunnis, it had been subject to abuse. Ahmad ibn Hanbal says:

There are two ways in determining the caliph. One way is that he shall be appointed by the preceding caliph just as the Prophet appointed Abu Bakr while Abu Bakr did the same to 'Umar, and 'Umar in turn appointed the six-man council. The second way is that the person himself would resort to the show of force even if it be through violence and the sword, as what 'Ali ibn Abi Talib did. Following these two (means) is necessary and opposing them is unlawful {haram}. It is not necessary for the ruler to be an Arab, Qurayshi, or has some deviant behavior. Only the fuqaha {jurists} should admonish them. 10

Was Ahmad ibn Hanbal so uninformed of the early history of Islam that he did not know that 'Ali ibn Abi Talib acquired the position of caliphate through the people's allegiance and not at the point of sword? Meanwhile, the function of the *fuqaha* is described as merely admonishing the caliphs while a corrupt power cannot be guided to the right path merely through admonition. In addition, most of Sunni *fuqaha* have been among the proponents and guardians of the corrupt ruling power.

The Wahhabi 'ulama' who claim to be followers of Ahmad ibn Hanbal and the Ahl as-Sunnah have so far neither admonished nor confronted the ruling establishment in Hijaz, but have been the well-wishers of the ruling apparatus and justifiers of its crimes.

The Wahhabis themselves have unconsciously quoted some traditions in their books which challenge the belief on following a just or debauchee ruler:

The Messenger of Allah (s) said: "I am afraid of deviant leaders for my *ummah*; they are deviant rulers {*umara'*}, scholars {*'ulama'*} and worshippers {*'ubbad*}."11

In this *hadith*, the Holy Prophet (s) has expressed dissatisfaction and concern over deviant rulers, and in fact, prohibited obedience to a deviant ruler.

Following the above *hadith*, it has been narrated from 'Umar ibn al-Khattab that he said to the narrator:

"Do you know what shall obliterate Islam?" I said: "No." He said: "What shall obliterate Islam is the deviation of the scholar {'alim}, the debate of the hypocrite by resorting to the Book (Qur'an), and the rule of misguided rulers." 12

This *hadith* also negates obedience to the misguided ruler, regarding it as unlawful. It must be stated that the issue of obedience to the ruler, be he just or unjust, is different from a comparable issue discussed in the Shi`ah school {madrasah}—that society is in need of a ruler though this ruler is corrupt because there will be chaos in the absence of a ruler, and order is better than disorder. This ruling in the Shi`ah is meant to prove the exigency of government in the society and not to explain the requisites and duties of the government.

# Obedience to the ruler and one vested with authority {wali alamr} among the Shi`ah

According to the Shi'ah, the following two verses have a spiritual connection with each other, and the

latter verse explains the former:

O you who have faith! Obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority among you. 13

Your guardian is only Allah, His Apostle, and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give the zakat while bowing down 14

The first verse states that you have to follow God and His Messenger (s) and in the absence of the Messenger (s), you have to follow those who are vested with authority among you, but it does not say "just ruler" as it is a verse with general application and includes both the just and unjust rulers. The second verse states that your guardian and leader is first of all, God and His Messenger (s), and in the absence of the Messenger of Allah (s), those who perform their prayers and give the *zaka*t, etc. In *Usul al–Kafi*, Husayn ibn Abu'l–A'la thus narrates:

asked Abu 'Abd Allah (Imam as–Sadiq ('a)): "Is it obligatory to obey the living rulers?" He ('a) said: "Yes, and they are those about whom Allah, the Honorable and Glorious, said: "Obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority among you" and about whom Allah, the Honorable and Glorious, also said: "Your guardian is only Allah, His Apostle, and the faithful who maintain the prayer and give the zakat while bowing down." 15

The above tradition establishes the connection between the two verses. The second verse was revealed about 'Ali ('a), and if we would like to elaborate, it will include the other Imams from the *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a), and after the Imams (i.e. during the major occultation of the 12th Imam ('a)), if we would like to take into account its closer referents, they must be the rulers and guardians who posses Islamic qualities to be the deputies of the Imams ('a), such as the Jurist–Guardian {wali al-faqih} who serves as the wali al-amr. If the Wahhabis deny the revelation of the said verse (as referring to 'Ali ('a)), at least the verse in question has set some qualifications for the ruler such as faith, performance of prayer and giving of zakat. If the ruler would know each of these in its true sense and practice it, that ruler can never be deviant and a debauchee.

# The first wali al-amr after the Prophet and the criterion of preeminence of the Companions

One of the oldest discussions between the Sunni and Shi`ah is the identity of the first *wali al–amr* after the Messenger of Allah (s), therefore it is very natural for the Wahhabi sect to participate in the discussion and take a stance. We always believe that this discussion should be done as a religious one only between the Sunnis and the Shi`ah, and no other party, internal or external, should get involved in the discussion, and Muslims should not allow the involvement of foreign–made sects. This discussion should be done in the atmosphere of friendship and complete Islamic brotherhood so that outsiders could not capitalize on it.

The Shi`ah regard 'Ali ibn Abi Talib ('a) as the first wali al–amr after the Prophet (s), but without taking into account the appointment of 'Ali ('a) in Ghadir Khumm and the will of the Prophet that "Of whomsoever I am master {mawla} 'Ali is also his master," and the numerous other proofs in the Qur'an, hadiths and history, the Sunnis defended the merit and qualification of the Companions to rule after the Prophet (s). Then, they engaged in the discussion as to who was superior to the other. In this regard, Ahmad ibn Hanbal says:

Sahabi {companion} is one who saw the Prophet (s) for one year, a month, or a moment, but there are differences among the Companions in terms of degree and superiority in virtue. Those of the first group are Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman in this order. Those of the second group are the Companions constituting the 6-man council such as 'Ali, Zubayr, Talhah, 'Abd ar-Rahman ibn 'Awf, and Sa'd ibn Waqqas, in this order of superiority. Each of these individuals is qualified to be the caliph and Imam according the order mentioned afore. The third order are those who participated in the Battle of Badr, who according to the order of superiority, are the *Muhajirun* {emigrants}16 and then the *Ansar* {helpers}. 17 But the individuals such as Mu'awiyah, 'Amru ibn al-'as and Abu Musa al-'Ash'ari who have not been mentioned in the three groups are those who have been generally described and praised in the Qur'an because as the effect of prostration, left a mark upon their forehead, about which the Qur'an says:

### Their mark is {visible} on their faces, from the effect of prostration. 18

In the last phrase stated by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, 'Abd ar–Rahman ibn Muljim (the murderer of 'Ali (a)) must also be included because he had also mark of prostration on his forehead!

The Wahhabis, who have involved themselves in the discussion on the difference between the Sunnis and the Shi`ah, have presented criteria for the hierarchy of the Companions in terms of superiority:

Abu Bakr is superior to all for four reasons: his virtue; his precedence in faith; the Prophet (s) preferred him over others; and the Companions unanimously elected him. Meanwhile, 'Umar is superior to the rest for two reasons: his virtue and his being appointed by Abu Bakr. In the case of 'Uthman, he has superior to others after 'Umar for two reasons: his virtue and the council preferred him over others. After 'Uthman, 'Ali is superior to the rest for two reasons: his virtue and his being elected unanimously by the people. 19

Yet, if we would take a survey of the event in Ghadir Khumm, the will of the Prophet (s), the revelation of verses about 'Ali ( $\dot{a}$ ), and all the pieces of evidence that highlight the rightfulness of 'Ali ( $\dot{a}$ ) in the Qur'an, *hadiths* and history, this question may be posed: What is indeed the true Qur'anic and Islamic criteria for the superiority of individuals over each other? What can be deduced from the Qur'an are the following:

## First, precedence in faith

And the Foremost Ones are the foremost ones: they are the ones brought near {to Allah}.20

## Second, struggle

And Allah has graced those who wage jihad over those who sit back with a great reward.21

# Third, knowledge and learning

Are those who know equal to those who do not know?22

# Fourth, God-wariness {taqwa}

Indeed the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most God-wary among you.23

There are also other criteria some of which are derived from the abovementioned ones. What can serve as the criteria for assessment are these and not those things that happened in the early period of Islam,

thus we have to acknowledge what happened and explain the past as it was.

It is obvious that the Companions of the Prophet (s) especially those who participated in the Battle of Badr and the Pledge of Ridwan {bay'ah ar-ridwan} or Pledge under the Tree {bay'ah ash-shajarah},24 the Battle of Uhud, and the like are all respectable because they were those who helped the Prophet (s), but this should not keep the truth covered. Imam as-Sajjad (a) used to send salutations upon all the Companions, extolling them thus:

O God, and give to those who have done well in following the Companions, who say, "Our Lord, forgive us and our brethren who were our forerunners in the faith," 25 Thy best reward. 26

Yes, Imam as–Sajjad (*'a*) says: "O God! Give Your best reward to those who follow the Companions, and in another part of his supplication, he (*'a*) prays for the Companions, Followers {*tabi'u*n} of the Companions, and the sons and wives of the Companions:

O God, and bless the Followers, from this day of ours to the Day of Doom, their wives, their offspring, and those among them who obey Thee.27

The Holy Qur'an has praised the first Emigrants {muhajirun} and Helpers {ansar}, saying:

The early vanguard of the Emigrants and the Helpers and those who followed them in virtue—Allah is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him. 28

This noble verse contains two vital points. The phrase, "those who follow them in virtue" indicates the fact that the pleasure of God belongs to the Companions who were good followers of the Prophet (s) and after the demise of the Prophet (s) they had remained his good followers by being steadfast to his will, such as Salman al–Farisi, Abu Dharr, and others, and in practice, they had traversed the path of the Prophet (s). Therefore, how could they earn the pleasure of God after they had followed the Prophet (s) during his lifetime but left the pale of his religion after his death and, by not adhering to his will {wasiyyah}, sever their followship with him?

The second point is that from the apparent meaning of the verse, it can be deduced that the fellowship of the *Ansar* and *Muhajirun* is supposed to the ensured until the end of their lives, but in reality not all the Companions have been so, and neither does the verse give such a guarantee because man is an ever

changing creature and not fixed. The supplication of Imam as–Sajjad (*a*) is therefore in description of the Companions who have the qualities of fellowship. This point will become clearer when we become aware that some hypocrites {munafiqun} were among the Companions, or that some Companions became apostates {murtaddun} afterward.29

The opposition and resistance of Umm al-Mu'minin 'A'ishah against the caliph of the time whose caliphate was legal and legitimate and whose opposition violated the admonition in this verse of the Qur'an to the wives of the Prophet:

#### Stay in your houses. 30

is a vivid example of the deviation of a famous Companion and *hadith* narrator.

So, if verses of the Qur'an describe the Companions such as the verse mentioned earlier, such verses are conditional. For example, it is thus narrated in a tradition allegedly from the Prophet (s):

"None of those who pledged allegiance under the tree shall enter hellfire." They were more than one thousand four hundred.31

In describing these very Companions, the Qur'an says:

#### Allah was certainly pleased with the faithful when they swore allegiance to you under the tree.32

In this verse, the use of the description "faithful" for those who pledged allegiance under the tree indicates that God's pleasure with them or their non-admission into hellfire includes those who were faithful on the day of the pledge, and does not include the hypocrites and the faithless among them. In the same manner, those who turned back from their faith after the pledge cannot be included.

Based on what has been said so far, generalizing all the Companions as truthful and taking their practice as a proof and an ideal pattern of behavior in rejecting the rightfulness of 'Ali ('a) on the issue of caliphate in the face of the evidence to the contrary in the Qur'an, *hadith*s and history does not hold water. Thus, sayings such as that of Ahmad ibn Hanbal that all the Companions are worthy of praise and eulogy without exception and that anyone who reproached the Companions would be *rafidi* {one who abandons the religion}33 has no credibility.

The Wahhabis say that the Companions of the Prophet (s) should not be cursed and that since the Prophet (s) said that the best of people are the Companions, anyone who curses Mu'awiyah, 'Amru ibn al-'as, Abu Musa al-'Ash'ari, Abu Hurayrah, Talhah, Zubayr, 'Uthman, 'Ali, Abu Bakr, or 'A'ishah shall be killed or something less severe than murder.34

The essence of the saying of the Prophet (s) is correct, but in practical terms, any debauchee and oppressor cannot be regarded and respected as a Companion just because he was once with the Prophet (s) or had seen him a few moments.

Of course, Islamic morality and the observance of courtesy demand that a faithful person, Shi`ah or non-Shi`ah, should avoid foul language or the use of obscene and abusive words upon anyone, especially the Companions of the Prophet (s) and among them, the wives of the Prophet (s) in particular who have been addressed in the Qur'an as:

... and his wives are as their mothers. 35

# The ministry of Imam 'Ali ('a)

The Wahhabis have taken the participation of Imam 'Ali ('a) in the congregational prayers under the leadership {imamah} of Abu Bakr and his acceptance of the ministry of 'Umar as proof that 'Ali ('a) has also recognized the caliphate of the first three caliphs. They say that 'Umar was the vizier of Abu Bakr and 'Ali was the vizier of 'Umar, and finally, 'Umar also became son-in-law of 'Ali and Fatimah and Umm Kulthum, the daughter of 'Ali was married to 'Umar.

Authoritative Shi`ah sources do not mention 'Umar's alleged marriage to the daughter of 'Ali and Fatimah ('a) because Umm al–Kulthum was born in 6 AH and passed away in 61 AH. They also do not mention her spouse and children. Her grave is in Bab as–Saghir of Sham. There is however something mentioned about the child of her sister Zaynab. Zaynab and Umm Kulthum are one year apart in age, and, of course some writers have claimed that Umm Kulthum and Zaynab are the same person.

Concerning the ministry of 'Ali (a), however, there are indications in Islamic references that 'Ali (a) cooperated with the second caliph only to the extent of giving counsel and guidance, which led 'Umar to say on over more than seventy occasions:

"Had it not been for 'Ali, 'Umar would have been destroyed,"

and this statement has been mentioned many times in both the Sunni and Shi`ah sources.

In spite of the fact that 'Ali ( $\dot{a}$ ) was a known warrior and always in the forefront in the battles during the time of the Prophet ( $\dot{a}$ ), he did not participate in 'Umar's military campaigns against Persia, Byzantine, Bayt al-Maqdis, etc. Also, during the reigns of Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman when the Muslim territory was in need of governors, deputies and commanders, 'Ali ( $\dot{a}$ ) had never been appointed to one of them because they themselves knew that that station and qualifications of 'Ali ( $\dot{a}$ ) were beyond these positions, and that they were more in need of his quidance in administering the state.

Besides, since Imam 'Ali ('a) did not recognize them as the *de jure* caliphs, he could not also assume official functions under their rule. However, because of the interests of Islamic society and in order to prevent unjust and inappropriate decisions and judgments which would be to the detriment of the people, Imam 'Ali ('a) gave them counsel and guided them in their tasks.

Imam 'Ali's (*a*) participation in the congregational prayers under the leadership of Abu Bakr or 'Umar did not mean that he recognized their rightfulness. It was rather for the sake of keeping the Muslim unity and keeping the society away from dissension and discord. Of course, from the perspective of jurisprudence, there are reasons for the permissibility of following them in prayer, but it does not provide a reason for their rightfulness to the caliphate because Imam 'Ali (*a*) had always explicitly regarded himself as the rightful caliph.

If ever 'Umar attained the right of seniority and precedence on account of his ministry during the time of Abu Bakr, the seniority and precedence of 'Ali (a) over the rest is natural because he was the minister of the Messenger of Allah (s) during his lifetime.

In *Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal*, an authoritative Sunni source, it is narrated that the Messenger of Allah (s) said:

O God! I would say something which my brother Musa (Moses) said: Give me a minister from my family and that is 'Ali.

#### All praise belongs to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds. 36

- 1. Surat an-Nisa' 4:59.
- 2. Al-As'ilah wa'l-Ajwibah, p. 321.
- 3. See 'Ali al-Qari al-Harawi al-Hanafi, Sharh Fiqh al-Akbar, under the chapter "it is permissible to pray behind a good person or a wicked person," p. 90; Ibn Taymiyah, Majmu' al-Fatawa (Riyadh, 1381 AH), vol. 3, p. 281. [Trans.]

- 4. See Al-As'ilah wa'l-Ajwibah, p. 322.
- 5. Surat al-Ma'idah 5:2.
- 6. Surat al-'Ankabut 29:8.
- 7. Nahj al-Balaghah, Saying 156.
- 8. Surat al-Ma'idah 5:2.
- 9. Surat al-Hadid 57:25.
- 10. Abu Zahrah Misri, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, p. 148.
- 11. Fath al-Majid.
- 12. Ibid.
- 13. Surat an-Nisa, 4:59.
- 14. Surat al-Ma'idah 5:55.
- 15. Usul al-Kafi, vol. 1, p. 264, hadith 6; p. 269, hadith 16.
- <u>16.</u> Muhajrun (lit. "Emigrants"): The Meccan Muslims who accompanied the Prophet (s) in his hijrah [emigration] to Medina. [Trans.]
- 17. Ansar (lit. "Helpers"): The Muslims of Medina who invited the Prophet (s) and Muslims of Mecca to migrate (hijrah) to Medina. [Trans.]
- 18. Surat al-Fath 48:29. See Ahmad ibn Hanbal, p. 148.
- 19. See Al-As'ilah wa'l-Ajwibah, p. 301.
- 20. Surat al-Waqi'ah 56:10-11.
- 21. Surat an-Nisa' 4:95.
- 22. Surat az-Zumar 39:9.
- 23. Surah al-Hujurat 49:13.
- 24. See the exegesis of Surah al-Fath 48:18: "Allah was certainly pleased with the faithful when they swore allegiance to you under the tree. He knew what was in their hearts, so He sent down composure on them, and requited them with a victory near at hand." [Trans.]
- 25. Surat al-Hashr 59:10.
- 26. As-Sahifah al-Kamilah as-Sajjadiyyah, Supplication 4.
- 27. As-Sahifah al-Kamilah as-Sajjadiyyah.
- 28. Surat at-Tawbah (or, Bara'ah) 9:100.
- 29. See Mu'alim al-Madrasatayn, vol. 1, p. 98.
- 30. Surat al-Ahzab, 33:33.
- 31. See Mu'alim al-Madrasatayn, vol. 1, p. 98.
- 32. Surat al-Fath 48:18.
- 33. Ahmad ibn Hanbal, p. 147.
- 34. Al-As'ilah wa'l-Ajwibah, p. 305.
- 35. Surat al-Ahzab 33:6: "The Prophet is closer to the faithful than their own souls, and his wives are their mothers."
- 36. Surat al-Fatihah, 1:2.

#### Source URL:

https://www.al-islam.org/new-analysis-wahhabi-doctrines-muhammad-husayn-ibrahimi/absolute-obed ience-ruler#comment-0