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Chapter 15: The Caliphs' Ignorance of Divine Commands

The previous chapters proved the fact that a comprehensive, all-inclusive religious leadership is solely based on a thorough knowledge of both principles and practical laws of Islam and a complete awareness of the needs of the Islamic community.

This is because the creation of man is nothing more than his perfection in light of his carrying out divine requirements.

The appointment of the prophets too, is to avoid man's fall in the depths of wrongdoing and to show him the way to attain virtues.

But man's perfection in the light of his acting out the divine laws is only possible if all these laws are available to man so that there would be no obstacles in the way of his perfection.

Man's access to all the divine commands however is only possible if there were among Muslims an individual aware of all the religious needs of the Islamic community and who could show people the straight path to perfection: in this way the purpose of man's creation of man would be fulfilled.

A review of the life-pattern of the three caliphs will reveal to us that none of them had full knowledge of the needs of the Islamic community.

Second to the Holy Quran, is a thorough knowledge of the Islamic traditions whose validity is so obvious to all Muslims. And many verses of the Holy Quran emphasize their acceptance by Muslims:

"And whatever the Apostle gives you accept it and from whatever forbids you, keep away". 1.

However, the knowledge of the caliphs concerning Islamic commands, was too limited and it could not be used to lead the Islamic community to its perfection.

The number of all the narrations that Ahmad Ibn Hanbal has narrated from Abu Bakr is not more then 802. Ÿalâlid Dîn Suîûtî was able to raise this number to 1043 with great struggle. And finally, in accordance with the latest statistics, the number of narrations by Abu Bakr is 1424.

Most of them, however are not narrations, but some statements. For instance, among those 142 narrations by Abu Bakr is the following sentence:

"The Prophet gave Abu Jahl a camel as a gift".

Furthermore some narrations from him are against wisdom and the divine book.

For instance, note the following two narrations:

1. "When the living men weep over a dead person, hot water would pour over the dead one"

the content of this narration is wrong for several reasons:

Firstly: the rational weeping over the dead body indicates human feelings and the Prophet wept a lot over the body of his son, Ibrahim. The Prophet in his lamenting said: dear Ibrahim, we cannot do anything for you and divine fate can not be reversed. The eye of your father is filled with tears and his heart is full of sorrow, but I will not say any word which might cause God's anger<u>5</u>".

When the Prophet became aware of the martyrdom of Jafar Ibn Abu Talib at the war of Mutah "he wept so much so that the tear-drops could be seen on his beard6.

Secondly, the holy Quran says:

"No bearer of burden shall bear the burden of another"; then how could the Prophet according to Abu Bakr, have said that through a person's weeping over a dead body, the latter would be hurt?

2. "The heat of hell for my Ummah is like the heat of the bath-room".

This statement not only may embolden the sinners, it is against the Quranic texts that deal with this issue.

Thus, as we see, some narrations by Abu Bakr are either among his everyday conversations or are against common sense and the contents of the divine book, and could not be labeled as narrations.

It is clear that such a person with this little amount of knowledge could not lead the Islamic community towards perfection and could not satisfy his Ummah's needs.

In one of his speeches, the caliph betrays himself by saying:

"You have bestowed upon me the rein of your own affairs while I am not considered the best among you. If you realized that I am right, then help me; but if you saw me doing wrong actions, stop me".

A religious leader in whose light the Islamic community should proceed, should not beg the Ummah for help. Instead of helping the Ummah such a leader should be helped by his Ummah?

Some samples of the ignorance of the first caliph

Here are some samples of the caliph's general knowledge which also reveal the state of his religious knowledge. These samples reveal to us that he did not know the answers to many questions:

1. The caliph was not aware of the amount of inheritance for one's grandmother. In reply to a woman whose nephew had died and who wanted to know God's command, the caliph answered: I have not seen anything concerning this topic in God's book or among the Prophet's speeches. Then he asked the woman to wait till he could ask the Prophet's close friends if they had heard anything in that regard. Moqayrah Ibn Shoaba was present in the session who said: I was present with the Prophet when he appointed one–third of the inheritance for one's grandmother. 8

The caliph's ignorance is not a source for surprise. It is surprising that he asked Moqayrah, a criminal, God's command in this respect.

2. A thief was brought to the first caliph. He was amputated in one leg and one hand. The caliph ordered his other foot to be cut. But then the second caliph remarked that the Prophet's tradition was hand's amputation He changed his mind and obeyed the second caliph's view. 9

These two samples could easily reveal the caliph's limited knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence. It is clear

that such a caliph with such a low of knowledge could not be a spiritual leader.

The level of knowledge of the second caliph

The number of the narrations which Omar narrates from the Prophet does not exceed 50. The following story reveals the second caliph's jurisprudential knowledge:

1. A man came to Omar and said: I became Junub [to become impure due to sexual intercourse or ejaculation] and I did not have access to water. What should I do?

Omar answered: you do not have to pray accidentally, Ammar was present and addressing Omar, he said: do you remember you and I were junub in one of the Islamic wars and we did not have access to water? I rubbed myself against dust and prayed, but you did not pray, do you remember? When I asked the Prophet about this problem, he replied: It would have been sufficient to touch the dust with your hands and then touch your face with those dusty hands.

The caliph addressed Ammar, saying "fear God" (i.e. do not say such a thing).

Then Ammar said: if it dissatisfies you, I will stop reporting this event 10.

This event is reported in books of Sunnites in different forms and all of them indicate that the second caliph was not aware of God's command vis-à-vis a junub person.

The Holy Quran, in two surahs, 11 has dealt with such an impure person; however, the caliph had not ever seen these two verses!

How could a person know the content of all these surahs while it took him twelve years to memorise surah Bagarah and he even sacrificed an animal for such an accomplishment 12?

2. The commands of Shak in prayer [doubt] are problematic for every Muslim. Few Muslims are unaware of such cases. Now let us see how much the caliph knew regarding this issue.

Ibn Abbas says: once Omar asked me: what should a Muslim do if he doubts the number of rakaahs [a unit of prayer or salat]. He answered the caliph: I, too, am unaware. Abdu Rahman Ibn Auf arrived and narrated a narration from the Prophet. 13

Perhaps Ibn Abbas's reply was not serious in this regard, but even if it were serious, the very fact that the caliph did not know the answer was strange!

3. It is desirable in Islam for the Muslim woman's marriage-portion not to exceed four hundred dirhams. However, each groom could offer a greater marriage-portion if he wishes to satisfy his bride.

Once the caliph was sitting on the pulpit criticizing high marriage–portions.

He criticized it to the degree that he said it was forbidden to increase the marriage-portion.

When he descended from the pulpit, a woman critically asked him: why did you disagree with an increase in marriage-portion; does God not say

"[And if you wish to have one wife in place of another] and you have given one of them a heap of gold, then take not from it anything"14

Realizing his error, the caliph begged God for forgiveness; then he added: everybody knows God's commands better than Omar 15. Then he ascended the pulpit, withdrawing what he had stated 16.

4. Few people are unaware of the fact that the performance of God's commands is dependent upon wisdom, capability and maturity. However, at the time of Omar, a mad woman who had done something abominable was brought to Omar's: he ordered her to be stoned. Fortunately, when she was being taken to be stoned, she came face—to—face with Imam Ali (as). Having heard the story, the Imam ordered the woman to return to Omar's presence. When the Imam saw Omar, he asked him: don't you remember the Prophet having said: both insane people and immature ones are exempt [from carrying out their religious obligations]. Omar said "God is great" and withdrew his verdict.

There are many cases of such misjudgments in the life of the second caliph. The reverend Allamah Amini, in the sixth volume of his book, Al-Ghadir, has shown through documents, one hundred cases of the caliph's infamiliarity with Islamic commands and has collected them under the title "Strange Cases of Omar's ignorance".

A research on such topics will reveal to us that we are not allowed to submit the leadership of the Islamic society to such individuals whose understanding of the book, Prophet's narrations and of the Islamic jurisprudence is so low that they do not know, for instance, that an insane person is not responsible for his acts. Does our intellect allow us to put the lives and rights of Muslims in the hands of those who could not distinguish between sanity and insanity?

Does our wisdom allow us to submit Muslims' lives to a man who does not know that a pregnant lady could bring to the world a six-month old baby and orders her to be stoned because of misjudgment? 17

The third caliph's level of knowledge

The third caliph's knowledge of Divine commands was not better than the knowledge of the first two caliphs either. The number of prophet's narrations by him is not more them 14618.

Othman's familiarity with Islamic principles and practical laws was meager indeed. Here we will present

the readers with some samples of his ignorance:

One of the clear commands of Islam is that an infidel's blood is not equal to a Muslim's blood. In this regard, the Prophet says:

"A Muslim is not to be killed just because he has killed an infidel; rather, the killer should pay blood-money".

At the time of Othman, such an error was going to take place but due to the recommendation of some of the Prophet's close friends, Othman changed his view 19.

There are numerous cases of such errors in Othman's life. We will not go into details, rather, we will sum up our discussion in the following way: the basic requirement for the leadership of the Islamic Ummah is vast knowledge of the divine commands. Such knowledge is possible for those who are pure; unfortunately, these three caliphs lacked this.

- 1. . Quran 59:7.
- 2. Mosnad Ahmad, vol. 1, pp. 2-14.
- 3. . Tarikh Al-Kholafa, pp. 54-66.
- 4. . Al-Ghadir, vol. 7, p. 108.
- 5. . Sirah Halabi, vol. 3, p. 34; Bihar, vol. 22, p. 157.
- 6. . Maghazi Vaqedi, vol. 2, p. 766; Bihar, vol. 21, p. 54.
- 7. . Quran 6:164.
- 8. . Muwattâ Mâlik, p. 335.
- 9. . Sunan Baîhaqî, vol. 8, p. 273.
- 10. . Sunan Ibn Mâjah, vol. 1, p. 200.
- 11. . Quran 4:43; and Quran 5:6.
- 12. . Al-Darr Al-Manthur, vol. 1, p. 21.
- 13. . Musnad Ahmad, vol. 1, p. 192.
- 14. . Quran 4:20.
- كلُّ الناس أفقهُ من عمر . 15.
- 16. . Al-Ghadir, vol. 6, p. 87 (reported from different Sunnite documents).
- 17. . We saw the details of the story in chapter five.
- 18. . Al-Athwaa, p. 204.
- 19. . Sunan Baîhaqî, vol. 8, p. 33.

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