

Leadership and Infallibility Part 1

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Imamat Is Of Allah's Grace

From the Shi'ite point of view, Imamat (God-assigned leadership) is an Allah's bounty upon mankind by which the religion was perfected. Allah, to whom belong Might and Majesty, said:

***"Today I have perfected your religion and completed my bounty upon you, and I was satisfied that Islam be your religion."*(Qur'an 5:3)**

See the articles on "Ghadir Khum" in Chapter 3 which provides the list of Sunni commentators of Qur'an who confirmed the revelation of the above verse in Ghadir Khum after the Prophet (S) announced 'Ali (as) as the master of all believers.

Imamat is the Grace (Lutf) of Allah which attracts mankind towards His obedience and keeps them away from His disobedience, without compelling them in any way. When Allah orders mankind to do something yet He is aware that either they can not do it, or it is very difficult for them to do it without His assistance, then if Allah does not provide His assistance, He would be contradicting His own aim. Obviously, such negligence is evil according to reason.

As such, Grace (Lutf) is one of Allah's character, and He is purified/exalted from inadequacy of lacking such attribute. In fact, the holy Qur'an states that: "Allah is Gracious to His servants..." (Qur'an 42: 19). And, there are many other places that Almighty uses the word Grace (Lutf) in His book. See for instance, 6: 103, 12: 100, 22: 63, 31: 16, 33: 34, 42: 19, 67: 14, etc.

The messengers of God were entrusted the responsibility of bringing new commandments from Allah to the people. They were warners as Qur'an testifies. However, some of the messengers were Also Imams/Guides. The successors of the last Messenger of God were not messengers/prophets, and as such, they did not bring any new message nor did they cancel any of the regulations set by the Prophet

(S).

They just served as guides and guardians of religion. Their mission is to explain, elaborate Shari'a (Divine law) for the people. They clear up confusing things and events which may happen in each era. Also they are the only individuals who have the full knowledge of Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad (S) after him, and as such, they are the only qualified people who can properly interpret the verses of the holy Qur'an and explain its meaning, as mentioned in Qur'an itself (See 3:7 and 21:7).

Imamat is a great bounty of Allah, because when people have a righteous leader who guides them, they can get closer to righteousness and depart from corruption and deviations in the matter of religion.

A divinely appointed Imam is also the most liable person to rule as the head of the community who can maintain justice and remove oppression. Of course, people have been given free will and can refrain from accepting the Imam, but they will be held responsible for that, as was for the case of the prophets. Nonetheless, the Imam would remain as a Proof of God on the earth and as spiritual leader for the believers among people who benefit his guidance.

Superiority Of The Imam

The Shi'a believe that, like the prophets, a divinely appointed Imam should excel the community in all virtues, such as knowledge, bravery, piety, and should possess complete knowledge of divine law.

If he does not, and Allah entrusts this high position to a less perfect person when a more perfect person is available, the inferior has been given preference over the superior, which is wrong rationally, and is against divine justice. Therefore no inferior person may receive Imamat from Allah when there exists a person superior to him.

Infallibility Of The Imam

If a divinely appointed leader is not infallible (Ma'sum), he would be liable to errors and to deceive others as well. In such a case, no implicit confidence may be placed in his sayings/commands/actions. A divinely appointed Imam is the most liable person to rule as the head of the community, and people are supposed to follow him in every matter.

Now if he commits a sin, people would be bound to follow him in that sin as well, because of their ignorance of whether that action is sin or not (Keep in mind the assumption that Imam is the most knowledgeable person in his community).

Such a situation is not acceptable by the Grace of Allah since obedience in sin is evil, unlawful, and forbidden. Moreover it would mean that leader should be obeyed and disobeyed at the same time, that is obedience to him is obligatory yet forbidden which is clearly a contradiction and is not commendable.

Besides, if it would be possible for an Imam to commit sin, it would be the duty of other people to prevent him from doing so. (Because every Muslim is obliged to forbid other people from unlawful acts.) In such a case, Imam will be held in contempt, and instead of being the leader of community, he will become their followers, and his leadership will be of no use as far as religion is concerned.

Imam is the defender of divine law, and this work can not be entrusted to fallible hands, nor can any such person maintain this task properly. Thus infallibility is an indispensable condition for a divinely appointed Imam or Caliph who is the protector and interpreter of the religious law.

Allah, Exalted, stated in Qur'an that:

"O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those vested with authority (Ulul-Amr) from among you."(Qur'an 4:59).

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِي الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ

This verse obliges the Muslims to obey two things: First, to obey Allah; second, to obey Messenger and those vested with authority (Ulul-Amr). The arrangement of the words shows that the obedience of Ulul-Amr is as much obligatory as is the obedience of the Messenger because Qur'an uses just one verb for both of them without repeating the verb again.

Naturally, it means that Ulul-Amr should be of the same importance as the Messenger; otherwise Allah would not have joined them together in this verse (Waw of Atf) under one verb. Interesting to note that Allah employs a separate verb for Himself before mentioning the Messenger and Ulul-Amr which shows that Allah has higher authority than that of the Messenger and Ulul-Amr.

It is also clear from the above verse that Ulul-Amr are not restricted to messengers otherwise Allah would only have said: "Obey Allah, and Obey Messenger only." But He added Ulul-Amr (those who are given authority by Allah). This is one of the places where the concept of Imams and the necessity of obedience to them come from.

In the previous article titled "Infallibility of the Prophets," we quoted many verses of Qur'an to prove the infallibility of the Prophet (S). All those verses proved the following two points:

1. The authority of the Messenger of Allah (S) upon the believers was unlimited and all-comprehensive. Any order given by him, under any condition, in any place, at any time, was to be obeyed unconditionally.
2. Supreme authority was given to him because he was sinless (Ma'sum) and free from all types of errors and sins. Otherwise, Allah would not have ordered us to obey him with no questioning or doubt.

In that Article, we also gave reference to a tradition in Sahih al-Bukhari which proves that both prophet

and divinely appointed Caliphs are infallible (Ma'sum).

Also from the verse 4:59 we concluded that Ulul-Amr have been given exactly the same authority over Muslims as of Messenger, and that the obedience of Ulul-Amr has the same standing as the obedience of the Messenger.

It naturally follows that Ulul-Amr must also be sinless (Ma'sum) and free from any type of error, otherwise, their obedience would not have been joined with the obedience of the Prophet and without any condition. The Commander of Believers, Imam 'Ali (as), said:

The one who disobeys Allah is not to be obeyed; and "verily obedience is for Allah and of His Messenger and those vested with authority." Verily, Allah ordered (people) to obey the Messenger because he was sinless and clean (pure), who would not tell people to disobey Allah; and verily He ordered (people) to obey those vested with authority because they are sinless and clean (pure), and would not tell people to disobey Allah." (Ilal al-Sharaye', by Shaikh al-Saduq, v1, p123).

Does Ulul-Amr Mean Muslim Rulers?

Many of our Sunni brothers tend to interpret "Ulul-Amr Minkum" as the rulers from among yourselves, i.e., Muslims rulers. This interpretation is not based on any logical/Qur'anic reasoning; it is solely based on the twists of history. The majority of the Muslims have remained as a vassal of the monarchs and rulers, interpreting and reinterpreting Islam and the Qur'an to strengthen their own kingdom.

The history of Muslims (like any other nations) is replete with the names of rulers whose injustice, debauchery and tyranny have tarnished the name of Islam. Such rulers have always been and will be. And we are told that they are the Ulul-Amr mentioned in this verse!

If Allah were to order us to obey such kings and rulers, an impossible situation would be created for Muslims. The wretched followers would be condemned to the displeasure of Allah, no matter what they do. If they obey these rulers, they have disobeyed the Command of Allah:

"Do not obey a sinner" (Qur'an 76:24).

And if they disobey such rulers, they have again disobeyed the Command of Allah: "Obey the Muslim rulers" (if it would mean so). Therefore if we accept this interpretation, Muslims are condemned to eternal disgrace whether they obey or disobey their fallible (sinful) Muslim rulers.

Also, there are Muslim rulers of different schools and persuasions. There are Shafi'is, Hanbalis, Malikis, Hanafis, as well as the Shi'a and Ibadis. Now, according to this interpretation the Sunnis residing under an Ibadi king (like in Amman) should follow Ibadi tenets; and those residing under a Shi'a ruler (like in Iran) should follow the Shi'a beliefs. Do these people have the conviction of courage to follow their professed interpretation to its logical end?

The famous Sunni scholar, Fakhr al-Razi, concluded in his Tafsir al-Kabir that this verse proves that Ulul-Amr must be infallible (Ma'sum). He argues that Allah has commanded people to obey Ulul-Amr unconditionally; therefore, it is essential for the Ulul-Amr to be infallible; because if there is any possibility of their committing sin (and sin is forbidden), it means that one has to obey them and also disobey them in that very action, and this is impossible!

However, in order to dissuade his readers from the Ahlul-Bait, Fakhr al-Razi invented the theory that the Muslim community as a whole is infallible!!! (Tafsir al-Kabir, by Fakhruddin Muhammad Ibn Umar al-Razi, v10, p144)

This interpretation is unique, and no Muslim scholar ever subscribed to this theory and it is not based on any tradition. It is quite surprising that Fakhr al-Razi accepts that each individual of the Muslim nation is fallible, yet claims that their sum total is infallible. Even a primary school student knows that 200 cows plus 200 cows makes 400 cows and not one horse.

But Fakhr al-Razi says that 70 million fallible people plus 70 million fallible people will make one infallible! Does he want us to believe that if all the patients of a mental hospital join together they would be equal to one sane person?

Obviously, with his knowledge of Qur'an, he was able to conclude that Ulul-Amr must be infallible; yet he did not pause to see that the verse contains the word "minkum" (from among you) which shows that Ulul-Amr should be part of Muslim community, not the whole Muslim nation. Moreover, if the whole Muslim nation is to be obeyed, then who is there left to obey?

Moreover, the whole community have never had a single voice. Then who should we follow among them? Also, the opinion of majority is not a good criteria to distinguish the false from the truth. Looking at the Qur'an, one could see that Qur'an severely denounces the majority of by frequently saying that "the majority do not understand," "the majority do not use their logic," "the majority follow their whims"... since the vision of the majority of people is always impaired due to their tendencies. (see e.g. 6:116, 5:49, 10:92, 30:8)

The Real Meaning Of Ulul-Amr

We now turn to the correct interpretation of the above verse, that is the interpretation of the verse by Ahlul-Bait. Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq (the 6th Imam) said that this verse was revealed about 'Ali, al-Hasan and al-Husayn, peace be upon them. Upon hearing this, someone asked the Imam: "People say, why did Allah not mention the name of 'Ali and his family in His Book?" Imam answered: "Tell them that there came the command of Salat (prayer), but Allah did not mention whether three or four units to be performed; it was the Messenger of Allah who explained all the details. And (the command of) Zakat (religious tax) was revealed, but Allah did not say that it is one in every forty Dirhams; it was the Messenger of Allah who explained it; and Hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca) was ordered but Allah did not say

to perform Tawaf (turning around Ka'ba) seven times; it was the Messenger of Allah who explained it. Likewise, the verse was revealed: Obey Allah, and obey the Messenger and those vested with authority from among you, and it was revealed about 'Ali and al-Hasan and al-Husayn (who were the only living Imams at the time of the Prophet)."

It is quite obvious that if Allah would have ever mentioned the name of Imam 'Ali (as) in Qur'an explicitly, those who bore mountains of hatred against him would have attempted to alter the Qur'an. Thus this was the Grace of Allah that He codified all the branches of knowledge of religion in Qur'an to be understood only by the processors of the understanding mind. And in this way, Allah kept Qur'an intact.

On the commentary of the verse 4:59 of Qur'an in which Allah orders us to obey Ulul-Amr, al-Khazzaz in his book, Kifayatul Athar, gives a tradition on the authority of the well-known companion of the Prophet (S), Jabir Ibn Abdillah al-Ansari (ra):

When the verse (4:59) was revealed, Jabir asked the Prophet (S): "We know Allah and the Prophet, but who are those vested with authority whose obedience has been conjoined to that of Allah and yourself?"

The Prophet (S) said: "They are my Caliphs and the Imams of Muslims after me. The first of them is 'Ali; then al-Hasan; then al-Husayn; then 'Ali son of al-Husayn; then Muhammad son of 'Ali who has been mentioned 'al-Baqir' in the Torah (the old testament). O Jabir! You will meet him. When you see him, convey my greetings to him. He will be succeeded by his son, Ja'far al-Sadiq (the Truthful); then Musa son of Ja'far; then 'Ali son of Musa; then Muhammad son of 'Ali; then 'Ali son of Muhammad; then al-Hasan son of 'Ali. He will be followed by his son whose name and nick name will be the same as mine. He will be Proof of Allah (Hujjatullah) on the earth, and the one spared by Allah (Baqiyyatullah) to maintain the cause of faith among mankind. He shall conquer the whole world from the east to the west. So long will he remain hidden from the eyes of his followers and friends that the belief in his leadership will remain only in those hearts which have been tested by Allah for faith."

Jabir said: "O Messenger of Allah! Will his followers benefit from his seclusion?" The Prophet said: "Yes! by Him who sent me with prophethood! They will be guided by his light, and benefit from his leadership during his seclusion, just as people benefit from the sun even though it is hidden in the clouds. O Jabir! This is from the hidden secrets of Allah and the treasured knowledge of Allah. So guard it except from the people who deserve to know." (Kifayatul Athar, by al-Khazzaz, p53).

Now that we know who "those vested with authority" are, it is evident that the question of obeying tyrant and unjust rulers does not rise at all. Muslims are not required by the above verse to obey rulers who may be unjust, tyrannical, ignorant, selfish and sunk in debauchery. They are, in fact, ordered to obey the specified Twelve Imams, all of whom were sinless and free from evil thoughts and deeds. Obeying them has no risks whatsoever. Nay, it protects from all risks; because they will never give an order against the order of Allah and will treat all human beings with love, justice, and equity.

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