

Ikhtilaf and Unity in Muslim Ummah: A Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT: Disagreement (Ikhtilaf) on religious issues has been a common phenomenon in Muslim Ummah as a result of their different judgments and perceptions on various matters. But discussing historical facts or jurisprudential differences should not in any way discourage Muslim unity. Unity of the Ummah is such a clear reality that there can be no two opinions expressed in the matter.

KEY WORDS: Ummah, Solidarity, Unity, Botherhood, disagreements

I. INTRODUCTION

Ikhtilaf, which means disagreement, difference of opinion and diversity of views, especially among the experts of Islamic law, is widely recognised in Islamic tradition as a natural phenomenon. In its meaning of ‘diversity’, ikhtilaf is also a recurring theme in the Qur’an, with references to the diverse phenomena of nature and diversity as a sign of God and proof of God’s existence and creation as:

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَالْفُلِّ الَّتِي تَجْرِي فِي الْبَحْرِ بِمَا يَنْفَعُ النَّاسَ وَمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مِنْ مَاءٍ فَأَخْبَا بِهِ الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا وَبَثَّ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ دَابَّةٍ وَتَصْرِيفِ الرِّيَّاحِ وَالسَّحَابِ الْمُسَخَّرِ بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ لآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ

Most surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day, and the ships that run in the sea with that which profits men, and the water that Allah sends down from the cloud, then gives life with it to the earth after its death and spreads in it all (kinds of) animals, and the changing of the winds and the clouds made subservient between the heaven and the earth, there are signs for a people who understand.

إِنَّ فِي اخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَمَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يَتَّقُونَ

No doubt the coming of night and day alternately and whatever Allah has produced in the heavens and earth ,therein are the signs for those who fear.

Etymologically, the word *ikhtilâf* comes from the root “KH-L-F” , which means originally “to replace,” “to succeed” . The same root in Difference in the Islamic Context History of the Present 55 forms other terms such as “succession” , “contravention,” or “infringement” , but also “different,” “to differ,” or “vary” , all of which bring us back to “*ikhtilâf*,” which carries the meaning of “difference,” but also “disagreement,” “divergence,” “dissension,” and “disparity.” And it is important to add that, among the varied meanings of the term *ikhtilâf*, the restricted interpretation, operative within the domain of law (*fiqh*), is of a “disagreement of opinion,” most specifically between the jurists, or *fiqhah*, or between the legal doctrines and schools (*madhâhib*). Yet the acceptance of this narrower technical sense was over determined, since it involved specific interests and privileged benefits, drastically reducing the possibilities of reflecting on other dimensions of *ikhtilâf*.

Ikhtilaf: A critical Dimension of Islam : It is a well-attested fact that, from the dawn of Islam, the new Muslim society was taken over by many divergences and dissensions. Ikhtilâf was quickly found at the center of debates and controversies that marked forever the 60 formation of classical Islamic thought from its origins onward, and most particularly during the first two centuries of its development. Since that time and until now, the Muslim world has oscillated between two contradictory tendencies. One moves toward the realization of an ideal of unity for the community. The other signals a reality made of differences, divergences, and divisions. In fact, in order to preserve its unity and to remain a seemingly unified community, Islam has had to legitimate certain divergences and integrate within itself a great number of dissensions. there is no doubt that ikhtilâf must have an ordinary sense, the use of which is found in everyday life. It should therefore suffice to remain attentive to the flow of everyday life in order to produce an account of the way in which, in discussions and conversations, above all, in arguments and disputes between friends and neighbors, and in public spaces as well (coffee shops, markets), individuals often refer to ikhtilâf. They do so in order to claim the possibility of holding a different opinion, the right to embrace a divergent position, or to advance proper arguments, even contradictory ones. In this way, the recourse to ikhtilâf constitutes a normative support, which allows individuals to justify their differences or divergences, without the constraints of an allegedly shared vision or arguments of uncontested authority. They do not have to surrender to the reason of the strongest.

In its ordinary sense, ikhtilâf is used and deployed in a prelegal register and outside of the religious sphere, simply because the differences or divergences at stake are neither juridical nor religious. They may also be familial, social, political or even tied to personal convictions. In a certain manner, this usage, which belongs to the realm of lived experience—daily social existence—is a “secularized” usage, independent of all religious determination. Ikhtilâf thus acquires a positive connotation which valorizes its worldly and ordinary usage, conferring on it a social function of great importance, which Difference in the Islamic Context guarantees mutual respect between members of society and social groups, the acceptance of all kinds of differences, and the recognition of the other in its differences.

Concept of Muslim Ummah : The Community in Islam is not founded on race, nationality, locality, occupation, kinship, or special interests. It does not take its name after the name of a leader or a founder or an event. It transcends national borders and political boundaries. The foundation of the community in Islam is the principle which designates submission to the will of Allah, commitment to His cause. In short, an Islamic community is present only when it is nourished and fostered by Islam. The Islamic community has a historic mission far beyond mere survival, sheer power, breeding, or psychological continuity.

Lack of Unity Among Muslim: Solidarity, cooperation and standing together are important and basic elements for constructing a sound, united Islamic society if the sincere Muslim were to take a brief look at the situation of Muslims throughout the world today, it would be enough to make him active in establishing unity among Muslims. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) initiated the concept of Ummah in the Madinan society integrating individuals of different colors races, ethnicities and social classes with equality into on united brotherhood, and as the Islamic dominions expanded, this Ummah assumed even a greater diversity and included a variety of people knitted together into common bonds- the likes of which the world has never witnessed, generated an open society for all to excel and where the only criterion worth consideration was human righteousness. But the Ummah today is distributed into many divisions and sects. Each one has severed its relations with the other. There are differences due to political parties, different lineages, professions and trades. The differences of the poor and rich classes were the foundations of dislike. Din and the worship of Allah was the conclusive treatment for making foreigners into locals and to remove the international, national and language differences.

إِنَّ بَيْتَهُ أُمَّتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاتَّقُونِ

And know that this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord. So take Me as your Protector.

Today this has become a means of us disputing and quarreling. This has brought the whole Ummah to brink of disaster, as the Holy Quran says:

فَتَنَقَّطُوا أَمْثَلَكُمْ بَيْنَهُمْ زُبُرًا كُلُّ حِزْبٍ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ فَرِحُونَ

But they have broken their religion among them into sects, each group rejoicing in the belief.

Allah Almighty has ordained differences between human beings in their mental capabilities, their languages, the color of their skin and their perceptions and thoughts.

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالاختلاف السنتكم والواحدكم ان في ذلك لايت للعلمين

And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colors. Indeed in that are signs for those of knowledge.

All this naturally gives rise to a multiplicity and variety of opinions and judgment provided that difference do not exceed their limits and provided they remain within the standard norms and proper behaviour, this a phenomenon that could prove to be positive and extremely beneficial these can be called as constructive differences and are a sign of a healthy society in which complete for what is best as the Holy Quran says.

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَمُهَيِّمًا عَلَيْهِ فَاحْكُم بَيْنَهُمْ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ عَمَّا جَاءَكَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ لِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَمِنْهَا جَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَلَكِنْ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَاكُمْ فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ جَمِيعًا فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ فِيهِ تَخْتَلِفُونَ

“...If Allah willed, He would have made you one nation. But that he may test you in what he has given you . so strive (as in a race) in good deeds....”

Differences in scientific and jurisprudential opinions can lead to progress and prosperity, and on a philosophical level, are beneficial if they lead to certainty (*Yaqin*) since all people must doubt, question, and differ from a matter before arriving at the truth. Therefore, Islam does not reject reasoning in the field of jurisprudence (*ijtihad*) as long as it is not contaminated with politics or personal aims and conceit. Thus all Muslim scholars agree that the *Mujtahid* (juristic scholar) receives two rewards for every correct decision and even one for every incorrect one, for he is endeavoring with all his effort to reach the correct decision.

Nevertheless, Muslim unity is one of the goals of Muslim society and is an obligation on all Muslims, both individually and collectively. Allah says in the Holy Qur'an:

إِنَّ بِيَدِهِ أَمْتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً ۗ وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاعْبُدُونِ

"Truly, your nation is one united nation, and I am your Lord,"

and:

إِنَّ بِيَدِهِ أَمْتُكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً ۗ وَأَنَا رَبُّكُمْ فَاتَّقُونِ

"Verily this (your nation) is one nation, and I am your Lord, so keep your duty to Me."

Throughout the twenty-three years of his propagation, the Messenger of Allah emphasized the unity of his nation and called them "my nation (*Ummati*).". The Holy Qur'an actually gives six meanings to the word *Ummah*: a group of people, an example, adherence to a religion, a religion itself, the time, and a group that follows one tradition and one way. It would not be used for a group that did not follow one tradition and one way.

The concept of unity itself is discussed in the Holy Qur'an on three levels. Foremost is the unity of humanity:

أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا ۗ إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَىٰكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

"O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable of you with Allah is the one who has piety."

The aim of this unity is to direct all the racial, tribal, and religious differences into a constructive direction. Thus the emphasis on "knowing one another" (*li-ta'arifu*) emphasizing that people find mutual understanding rather than conflict so that no one denies another's rights for life and prosperity.

Prophet Muhammad also used the parable of the human body to describe the Muslim nation. If one part suffers, the entire body will suffer. One of the greatest achievements of the Messenger of Allah was to unite hundreds of fragmented Arab tribes throughout the Arabian Peninsula into a single, strong nation. When he united them, he did not eliminate differences of opinion between them, but he enabled them to have dialogue with each other and come to a sense of mutual understanding. Under this philosophy, the Muslim nation was a powerful nation in the past, and only with this understanding will it be able to return to this respected position among the nations of the world and have the same significant role that it did in the past. A modern example which the Muslim countries should examine is the European Union in which several states of different languages, cultures, ethnicities, religions, and political agendas have unified under one monetary system, economic agenda, and political front. The Muslim governments could be similarly united if they so chose. The first steps to this unity are the regular conferences and seminars which are held by Muslim intellectuals and scholars and aim to bridge the gap between the schools of thought. But Muslims are the only people who disagree and disputing with each other, although there are many reasons for their unity. It is enough that they all direct themselves towards Qibla prayer; that they believe that there is no god but Allah and the Muhammad is the Messenger; that they are satisfied with Allah as their lord with Islam as their religion, with the Quran as their standard, and with Muhammad as their prophet and messenger. Other numerous clear and unambiguous Quranic texts commanding the Muslims to remain unified and forbidding them from becoming divided amongst themselves are as follows. This concept is a basic tenet of every Muslims belief.

Allah says:

وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا ۗ وَادْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءَ فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا ۗ وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَىٰ شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُمْ مِنْهَا ۗ كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

Hold fast, all together, to the rope of Allah and do not become divided amongst yourselves.

وَاطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَلَا تَنَازَعُوا فَتَفْشَلُوا وَتَذْهَبَ رِيحُكُمْ وَاصْبِرُوا ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ

And obey Allah And His Messenger, And do not fall into disputes, lest you lose heart and fail. Be patient for truly Allah is with those who are patient.

وَالْعَصْرِ ۚ إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ ۚ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ ۚ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ

By time; verily man is at loss, except those who have faith, perform righteous deeds, and enjoin each other to truth and enjoin to patience.

This is but a small sample of the texts found in the Quran on this matter. The principle of coming together as a community on the basis of righteousness and obedience to Allah is a clear and undisputable principle of faith. The general acts of worship, like prayer, fasting, the pilgrimage, and the 'id prayers, are all practical examples of this fact.

The advice of the Prophet Muhammad on this matter can be found in many hadith. Possibly, the most well known of these is : (**Allah is pleased with three things for you...(among them) that you hold fast, all together, to the rope of Allah and do not become divided amongst yourselves**) .

We have seen disagreements that have occurred between Prophets as well as a disagreement that occurred between the Companions of Prophet Muhammad concerning prisoners of war. The Companions disagreed on numerous other matters as well, so many in fact that we would be hard pressed to try and enumerate them. They disagreed about when to pray while on the road to *Banu Qurayzah*. Their disagreement on numerous matters of Islamic Law is well known. This is a fact that can neither be avoided nor denied. It is part of human nature. Compounding this matter is that people have different degrees of knowledge, different levels of understanding, and different opinions about the authenticity of the texts that they rely upon. These and many other factors lead to disagreements. It is fruitless to deny the existence of disagreement. It is like denying human nature. The best thing to do is to acknowledge its existence and try to place it into a proper framework to make sure that disagreement never infringes upon the necessary principles of the religion, matters that our pious predecessors were unanimous about. There is nothing wrong with setting other guidelines for disagreement as the situation requires them, so that matters can be studied and reviewed properly, as long as the basic, indisputable principles of the religion are left intact.

How to and Where to Disagree:

1. Disagreement is allowed in secondary matters, not in basic principles:

Disagreement must not occur in the basic principles of the religion. The predecessors were, for example, unanimously agreed on the fact that prayer is an obligatory pillar of Islam and that whoever denies its being obligatory is an unbeliever. At the same time, they disagreed about certain details related to the performance of prayer and the conditions for its valid performance. They disagreed on the legal ruling regarding the person who neglected prayer. If any of these points is taken as a basis for unity, then discord, polarization, and antagonism will be the inevitable result.

For instance, a sister once asked me about a certain group that exists in one of the states of India. This group claims that if a person disputes the unbelief of someone who neglects prayer, then that person is not from the people who will be saved. The position of this group is wrong for a number of reasons. Firstly, none of the early scholars ever held such a position. Secondly, such a stance implies that the great jurists Al-Shafi'i, Malik, and Abu Hanifah are not from the group who will be saved, since they do not claim that a person who neglects prayer is an unbeliever. They also agreed about the authority of the Sunnah, as Allah says:

مَا آفَاءَ اللَّهُ عَلَى رَسُولِهِ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْقُرَى فَلِلَّهِ وَاللرَّسُولِ وَ لِذِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسْكِينِ وَ الْبَنِي السَّبِيلِ كَذٰلِكَ لَا يَكُوْنُ دُوْلَةٌ بَيْنَ الْاَغْنِيَاءِ
مَنْكُمْ ؕ وَ مَا اَنْتُمْ بِالرَّسُوْلِ فُخْدُوْهُ * وَ مَا تَنْهٰكُمْ عَنْهُ فَانْتَهَوْا ؕ وَ اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ ؕ اِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيْدُ الْعِقَابِ

.... Take what the Messenger gives you and refrain from what he prohibits you.....

They disagreed on whether or not a certain hadith is authentic. They differed about how to reconcile the meanings of two hadith that apparently contradict one another. They disagreed on how to understand some of the texts. These are some of the reasons for the differences of opinion that they had, even in some matters that seem to us so obvious that we are surprised that they disagreed about them at all.

For instance, they disagreed about how the call to pray was to be executed, in spite of the fact that it had been called five times a day every day since the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him). They disagreed about raising the hands in supplication while standing in prayer. They disagreed about the exact times of the prayers. They disagreed about many aspects of how to perform the pilgrimage. They disagreed on matters pertaining to *Zakah*. We can read about these and many other disagreements in the books of Islamic Law. The fact that these disagreements exist does not give us license to do as we please. It is for the student of Islamic Law to decide about these matters on the basis of the sound principles and methods of that discipline.

2. Disagreement is allowed in means, not in the ultimate ends: The purposes and objectives of Islam are agreed upon, like protecting the five universal human needs and calling people to the worship of Allah. Muslims are unanimously agreed that it is an obligation to call others to Islam, and this obligation may be on an individual or on the Muslim community as a whole. Allah says:

جَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ اَحْسَنُ ؕ اِنَّ رَبَّكَ بِوَاَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ صَلَّٰ عَنْ سَبِيْلِهِمْ وَ بِوَاَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِيْنَ اُدْعُ اِلَى سَبِيْلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمِ وَ الْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَ

Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching.....

لِكُلِّ اُمَّةٍ جَعَلْنَا مَثَسًا لِّمْ نَسَبُوْهُ فَلَا يُنَارِعُ عَنْكَ فِي الْاٰمْرِ وَ اِدْعُ اِلَى رَبِّكَ ؕ اِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ هُدًى مُّسْتَقِيْمٍ

.....Invite to your Lord..... .

قُلْ بِذِهِ سَبِيْلِيْ اَدْعُوْا اِلَى اللَّهِ ۚ عَلٰى بَصِيْرَةٍ اَنَا وَ مَنْ اتَّبَعَنِيْ ؕ وَ سُبْحٰنَ اللَّهِ وَ مَا اَنَا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِيْنَ

Say: This is my way. I invite to Allah upon sure knowledge.

Approaches to this work may differ from time to time and from country to country. In Islamic Law, any approach taken in inviting people to Allah can be assumed to be permitted unless there is explicit evidence to show that it contravenes the Law. People may come up with novel ways of calling others to Islam. In some cases, a certain approach may become mandatory if there is no other way available to successfully convey the Message. Today, the diversity of media at our disposal gives us many options. We must exercise our judgment and use our discretion to utilize these means effectively. We are bound to disagree on how to do so, but this should not cause us to get angry with each other or cause us to become divided. We must keep in mind that we all have the same goal - to spread the message of Islam to those who need it and to those who are ignorant of it, and to as wide a cross section of humanity as possible.

3. Differences in emphasis are permitted:

There are many obligations in Islam that fall on society as a whole and not on every individual equally. For this reason, some people will engage in calling others to Islam, while others will engage in enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. Allah says:

وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ ۗ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ۗ

Let there arise from among you a group of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. They are the successful ones.

This means that among the Muslims there must be some who are engaged in this work.

Other Muslims will be engaged in other activities. Some will devote themselves to jihad. Then there are those who specialize in learning and teaching others the matters of their religion. This goes for all other activities of life. In fact all those who work to protect the welfare of the people, those who treat their illnesses, assist them in their travels and in their settled lives are engaged in fulfilling the collective obligations of Islamic Law, whether they are aware of it or not. Therefore, it is not right for a person who Allah has guided to excel in a certain activity to belittle the work engaged in by others. Allah refers to such behavior when He says:

فِيمَا نَقَضْتُمْ مِيثَاقَهُمْ لَعْنَتُهُمْ وَجَعَلْنَا قُلُوبَهُمْ قَاسِيَةً يُحَرِّفُونَ الْكَلِمَ عَنْ مَوَاضِعِهِمْ وَنَسُوا حَظًّا مِمَّا ذُكِّرُوا بِهِ ۗ وَلَا تَزَالُ تَطَّلِعُ عَلَى خَائِنَةٍ مِنْهُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا
مَنْهُمْ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاصْفَحْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

....And they forgot about a good portion of the Message that was sent to them....

No single individual can encompass all aspects of Islamic Law and all the requirements of Muslim society. Every Muslim is needed, some fulfilling these duties and some fulfilling those. Forgetting the relevance of activities and duties other than those in which we ourselves are engaged is a cause of enmity and hatred.

Regarding the verse "And they forgot about a good portion of the Message that was sent to them", Ibn Taymiyah writes:

Allah informed them - the People of the Scripture - about their forgetfulness of what was sent to them, referring to their abandoning some of the works that they were commanded to perform. This was a cause for hatred and enmity to spread among them.

This is exactly what is happening between us today, like the disputes we find people engaging in with regard to the principles of their faith as well as many secondary matters, and like the scholars and worshipers who resemble the Jews and Christians when each tells the other that they have nothing to stand upon. Allah says:

وَ إِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ آمِنُوا كَمَا آمَنَ النَّاسُ قَالُوا أَنُؤْمِنُ كَمَا آمَنَ السُّفَهَاءُ ۗ أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ هُمُ السُّفَهَاءُ وَ لَكِن لَّا يَعْلَمُونَ

And when it is said to them, "Believe as the people have believed," they say, "Should we believe as the foolish have believed?" Unquestionably, it is they who are the foolish, but they know [it] not.

Likewise we see the jurist who concerns himself with outward deeds and the Sufi who concerns himself with spiritual matters condemns each other's approach. They accuse each other of being outside of the faith or at least treat each other with the same level of aversion. Hatred and enmity grows between them, though Allah has commanded us to purify our hearts as well as our outward actions. Both pursuits are part of our religion and both are obligatory. Many of our pious jurists are only concerned with the ritual purification of their bodies and give it inordinate attention while neglecting the obligatory and voluntary matters related to the purification of their hearts. The only kind of purification they understand is physical. Conversely, we find many Sufis and ascetics inordinately concerned with the purification of their hearts to the exclusion of the necessary and voluntary acts of outward purification. We find the jurists becoming plagued by misgivings making them use too much water and fearing that all sorts of pure substances are tainted with impurities, avoiding what Islamic law does not command them to avoid. All the while their hearts are full of envy, pride, and rancor towards their brethren. In this way they resemble the Jews. I do not mean to generalize. I am only speaking of what affects a portion of the jurists. As for the Sufis, they are apt to fall into gross acts of negligence while they go to excesses in rectifying their inner selves. Some of them go so far as to make ignorance of what is evil and must be shunned a means of purifying their souls.

They fail to make the distinction between keeping the inner self free from desiring what is wrong and the heart being able to recognize what is in fact wrong, the latter being a religious obligation. Due to this ignorance and negligence, they might fail to avoid things that are impure and fail to perform the obligatory acts of physical purification. In this way they resemble the Christians. Enmity arises between these two groups because both of them went to extremes and "forgot about a good portion of the Message that was sent to them." In this way they lost sight of the truth. They can even go so far as to oppress each other and commit acts of aggression. Sometimes they attack each other. Sometimes they attack the rights that Allah has over them. Both of these things, in fact, go hand-in-hand. This is why Allah says

إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ . وَ مَا اخْتَلَفَ الَّذِينَ أُوْتُوا الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْعِلْمُ بَعْيًا بَيْنَهُمْ ۗ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِاللَّهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ

"....Due to envy among them"....

Each group goes against the other without realizing the truth that the other possesses, so they do not refrain from attacking that truth. What we find is that the religion is the single cause for bringing about unity and feelings of mutual affection. This requires acting upon all aspects of the religion, which we can sum up as the worship of Allah alone, without partner, both outwardly and inwardly. Likewise, the reason for division is to forget about a good portion of the Message out of envy for one another. The effects of unity are to attain Allah's mercy, His pleasure, and His blessings. This leads to success in this world and the Hereafter and an illuminated countenance on the Day of Resurrection. The results of division are Allah's punishment, His curse, and a darkened countenance on the Day of Resurrection. Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) will disassociate himself from such people." The Sheikh Ibn Tamiyah has discussed all this in *Majmal al Fatwah* while concentrating the circumstances and difficulties of his time. We can, though, apply his words to any of the many rival groups today, even those groups that do much good and act in accordance with the Sunnah. We find between them rivalry in their activities, in matters of knowledge, and in their devotions. This leads these good people to treat each other harshly, to fall into enmity and hatred, and to fail to acknowledge each other's rights.

II. CONCLUSION

We must seek out our areas of agreement, not our points of contention. Whoever goes into a matter looking for things that will displease him will definitely find such things, either in the generality of someone's statement, or in some difference of opinion, or in some legal verdict. People should deal with each other without suspicion and without digging up each other's faults. Muslim unity and solidarity must be based on faith. Whoever is clearly a Muslim and clearly possesses faith has with him the basis for brotherhood. Faith increases and decreases, as does a person's Islam. All Muslims share a common set of rights that are set forth in the sacred texts. As for correcting the mistakes that people make, this does not run contrary to the spirit of brotherhood as long as this correction comes in the spirit of advice and in a concerned and clement manner. Correcting someone's faults does not entail denying that person his rights. A single person might have within him elements of faith and hypocrisy. A person might deserve one's loyalty in some matters while requiring to keep one's distance in other matters. Scholars give the following example to illustrate this point: A person can have his hand cut off for stealing, but he still has the right to receive funds from the public treasury if he is poor. Allah mentions these relationships in the following verses and makes clear that correcting people and giving them advice are activities in harmony with the spirit of brotherhood:

وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتُ بَعْضُهُمْ أَوْلِيَاءُ بَعْضٍ يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَ يُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ وَيُطِيعُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ
 ۗ أُولَئِكَ سَيَرْحَمُهُمُ اللَّهُ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ

The believers, men and women, are protectors of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong

إِنَّمَا الْمُؤْمِنُونَ إِخْوَةٌ فَأَصْلِحُوا بَيْنَ أَخَوَيْكُمْ وَ اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

The believers are but a single brotherhood, so make peace and reconciliation between your brothers, and fear Allah that perhaps you might receive mercy .

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَ تَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ ۗ وَلَوْ آمَنَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ ۗ مِنْكُمْ الْفَاسِقُونَ أَكْثَرُ

You are the best of peoples brought forth for humanity, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah....

Correcting others is a desired goal, but it must be carried out with mercy and kindness. The one doing so must have love in his heart for others and a sincere desire to give beneficial advice. We should keep a good opinion of others and look not for excuses for their behavior. We must observe others rights. We should be ever vigilant to make sure our heart never feels happy that others has fallen into error. The problems that we as Muslims are suffering from today are widespread and deeply rooted.

The entire Muslim nation is infected with them. The problems that we are facing are from ourselves more than they are from our enemies. They start from within our individual selves. If we cannot purge them from our hearts, our minds, our words, and our deeds, then we will not be able to succeed. We are always waiting for others to change their opinions and reform themselves, but we never seem willing to do so ourselves. We confuse steadfastness in faith with obstinacy towards our own opinions, because we learned these opinions first from our sheikhs and teachers, even if those opinions might be weak. It is dangerous to categorize other people. This was an affliction of the nations of old that came before Islam. It is also the sickness of many groups today. When a person sees from another something he does not like, he hastily categorizes that person and declares him to be from this group or that, according to the prejudices of his own mind. In this way, he can dismiss the other person and erect a permanent barrier between him and that other. He can also build a barrier that prevents other people from benefiting from the disliked individual. He just has to declare: "He is a *Salafi*" or "He is an *Ikhwani*" or call him a "*Tablighi*", or a "*Qutbi*" to get the desired effect. Often such declarations are made without any knowledge, and more often than not out of malice. The one making the accusation rarely knows the details of what the other person actually believes, and is often just parroting the categorization made by others without even knowing who categorized the person in the first place. For a person to be able to declare someone else as belonging to a certain group or subscribing to a certain ideology, he needs to possess three things. First, he must be a person of knowledge and insight and he must possess the integrity to make a sound decision. Secondly, he must have detailed knowledge of that other person and the principles and beliefs to which that person subscribes. Judgments can only be made about something that you understand. Lastly, he must have full knowledge of the school of thought or group that he declares that person to be a part of. Though very few people possess these three qualities, we see that an overwhelmingly large number of people take the matter lightly and categorize anyone they see who seems to agree with the ideas of this group or that in any matter whatsoever, no matter how trivial.

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