



Deviance

Examining the Understandings and Theological Claims of Takfiri Ideological Movements in Light of Classical Islamic Scholarship

How Takfiri Movements Distort the Meaning of God's Statement:

﴿ And he who does not judge according to what God has revealed, then they are the disbelievers ﴾

issue

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, Most compassionate
All praise belongs to Allah ﷻ, Lord of all the worlds, and greetings
and salutations be upon the most honorable of the Prophets and the
Messengers, our liege lord and Prophet, Muhammadﷺ, the truthful
one, and all upon his household and companions.

A Pause for Thought

Let us ask the question: “What is the meaning of Allah’s ﷻ statements that: **﴿And he who does not judge according to what Allah has revealed, then they are the disbelievers﴾**, **﴿unjust﴾**, and **﴿iniquitous﴾**¹ ?

Do these verses suggest that establishing Allah’s law must be achieved even by means of combat?

Is it possible to conceive that Muslims fight amongst each other so that the ‘meaning’ of this verse be achieved? Some people have held this opinion. But we must ask, who are they, how did they interpret this verse and is their understanding correct according to the Islamic scholarly tradition? Is it expected to mean that it incites the fulfillment of Allah’s ﷻ law – even by means of fighting?

Is it possible that fighting is established amongst the Muslims so that this verse may be achieved? Some have understood this to be the case. Who are these people that understood the verse in such a fashion? How did they interpret it, and is this the correct understanding?

1- 5:44,45,47.

Introduction

How did followers of takfiri movements understand the meaning of this verse?



The ideological leaders of these movements believe that anyone who does not rule according to Allah's ﷻ law is a disbeliever, who must be fought, and may be permissibly killed. In fact, he who chooses for the rule of his country someone who does not govern according to Allah's ﷻ law is to be considered a disbeliever, and the one who chooses man-made laws in his affairs a *mushrik* (polytheist)!

These judgements stem from the way extremist movements understand the verse: ﴿And he who does not judge according to what Allah has revealed, then they are the disbelievers﴾.

What results from this unsound understanding?

1. Labeling the majority of the Muslim community as disbelievers
2. Describing the mainstream Muslim community as having returned back to the beliefs of the polytheistic period of ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*).
3. Making takfir* of Muslim rulers.
4. The appearance of violent takfiri movements culminating with the faction known as ISIS.



* **Takfiri Ideology:** An ideology that declares anyone who differs with its criterion of 'true' belief to be an apostate whose blood become permissible to shed.

From where did these understandings emerge?

The first point of origin

Abū al-ʿAḫlā al-Mawdudī

1321-1399 / 1903-1979



Abū al-ʿAḫlā al-Mawdudī stated that his understanding of the three verses related to Allah's sovereignty was: 'Verily the Qur'an states that every rule which contradicts divine law is not just wrong or forbidden but is also **disbelief**, misguidance, oppression and corruption. Likewise, any rule which is of this nature is the rule of the period of **ignorance** (*jahiliyyah*). No person believes (*yu'min*) unless he completely rejects any rule that contradicts divine law.'²

The link that binded the theory to practical application

Sayyid Qutb

1324-1386 / 1906-1966



The summit of Sayyid Qutb's thesis was the notion of sovereignty (*hakimiyya*) which he adopted from the thought of Abū al-ʿAḫlā al-Mawdudī. He advanced it, adding to it very dangerous matters, including his own peculiar understandings concerning the related verses. Qutb made Sovereignty, with all its related jurisprudential rulings in Islam, to be an issue of creed (*aqida*). He therefore adjudged anyone who did not rule according to what Allah ﷻ has revealed to be a **disbeliever**, even if such a person believed it to be true (*haqq*) and a revelation from Allah ﷻ.³

This manifests itself in his discussion regarding his interpretation of Allah's ﷻ saying: ﴿And he who does not judge according to what Allah has revealed, then they are the unjust﴾ / ﴿the iniquitous﴾. Qutb says: 'and this new description (i.e. unjust) of those who do not rule by Allah's law does not mean that it is a case separate from the previous case of disbelief as mentioned in the verse: ﴿And he who does not judge according to what Allah has revealed, then they are the disbelievers﴾. Rather it just means that this is an additional attribute to describe the one who does not rule in accordance with what Allah ﷻ has revealed. Such a person is a disbeliever by rejecting the divinity of Allah and His being the sole legislator for His servants. He is also a disbeliever due to his claim that he has a right to divinity because he claims that man has a right to legislate laws.'⁴

2- *Al-Khilafah wa al-Mulk*, by Abū al-ʿAḫlā al-Mawdudī, p. 17.

3- See *Thilal al-Qur'an* by Sayyid Qutb, 2/887.

4- *Thilal al-Qur'an*, 2/900.



Muhammad Qutb's understanding of this verse was: 'Legislation in accordance with other than what Allah has revealed, and the acceptance of legislation contrary to what Allah has revealed, according to Allah's ﷻ rule, **invalidate the statement of faith** La-ilaha ilaLah. For this reason the definitive and conclusive verdict was revealed: ﴿And he who does not judge according to what Allah has revealed, then they are the disbelievers﴾.⁵

Observe how these understandings of the aforementioned verses came about in a strange way and at a very late period in the umma. These understandings are severed from the understandings that the pious predecessors (*salaf*) had of these verses. These understandings have lead to charging the Muslim community with verdicts of *jahiliyyah* and **disbelief!**

Verification

Do these interpretations agree with Prophetic teachings, the understandings of the companions, the pious predecessors (*salaf*) and the classical scholars?

In the time of
prophethood

**When and amongst whom was the noble
verse revealed in reference to?**

This verse was revealed in al-Madinah al-Munawwarah when the Jews questioned the Prophet ﷺ concerning the affair of the two adulterers. It was exclusively revealed in regard to the non-Muslims.⁶

5- *Mafahim yajib 'an Tusahhah*, p. 188.

6- *Asbab al-Nuzul*, 1/195, by Abu al-Hassan Ali al-Wahidi al-Naysaburi (d. 468 AH), *Zad al-Masir*, 1/551, by Abu al-Faraj 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jawzi (d. 597 AH), and Muslim, the chapter of the stoning of the Jews the people under Muslim protection (Ahl al-Dhimmah), 1700.

The explanation of the interpreter of the Qur'an and the scholar of the Muslim community (*ḥabr al-Ummah*), our master 'Abd Allah b. Abbās رضي الله عنه :

Tawūs narrates on the authority of Ibn Abbas concerning Allah's ﷻ saying «**And he who does not judge according to what Allah has revealed, then they are the disbelievers**» that he said: "it is not disbelief which they are heading towards." In another narration he said: '[it is] a kind of disbelief which does not remove one from the faith' and '[it is] a disbelief other than absolute disbelief, an oppression other than absolute oppression and an inequity other than absolute inequity.'⁷

Impugment and Validation (*Jarh wa Ta'dil*)⁸

Is there anybody who opposed the interpretation and understanding of Ibn Abbas towards this verse and what is its significance?

Yes, there is.

1. **The first objection** that is raised against the narration of Ibn Abbas' understanding is that the chain of transmission of the narration includes Hishām b. Ḥujayr. Some scholars have rendered him weak.
 - **A reponse to this objection:** it suffices to consider Hishām b. Ḥujayr as a reliable source that both al-Bukhārī and Muslim cited him in their authentic collections. Likewise, the Imam Sufyān al-Thawrī followed up (*tāba*⁹) the narrator Hishām b. Ḥujayr, and this narration was narrated on his authority by the Imam Sufyān b. 'Uyaynah.
2. **The second objection:** the expression 'a disbelief other than absolute disbelief' is the wording of Ṭawūs, and is not the saying of Ibn Abbas according to the narration of 'Abd al-Razzāq.
 - **The response:** indeed the narrator of this expression on the authority of Ibn Abbas is Sufyān b. 'Uyaynah, and he is more proficient than 'Abd al-Razzāq, and is thus granted preponderance. It is also the narration of al-Ḥākim in al-Mustadrak which was authenticated and agreed to by al-Dhahabī.

The Conclusion:

This objection is weak and does not stand as proof for the rejection of the interpretation of Ibn Abbas to this noble verse.

7- Reported by Muhammad b. Nasr al-Marwazī (d. 294 AH) in the book *Ta'ṭhīm Qadr al-Ṣalāh*, 2/521/574/575.

8- The discipline of *Jarh wa Ta'dil* is the science by which the integrity of the transmitter is established upon which the credibility and authenticity of the hadith is then ruled.

9- *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, p. 33-34.

The Understanding of the Scholars of the Community

Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 241 AH), may Allah bestow His mercy upon him.

Ismā‘il b. Sa‘d said: ‘I asked Ahmad about Allah’s saying: **«And he who does not judge according to what Allah has revealed, then they are the disbelievers»**. I inquired: ‘so what is this disbelief?’ to which he replied: ‘disbelief which does not remove one from the fold of the religion’.¹⁰

Imam Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr (d. 463 AH), may Allah bestow His mercy upon him.

The scholars have reached a consensus that oppression in governance is one of the major sins, for those who perpetrate it intentionally, with knowledge of it. There are very punitive reports about this that have been narrated from the pious predecessors. Allah ﷻ said: **«And he who does not judge according to what Allah has revealed, then they are the disbelievers»**, **«unjust»**, and **«iniquitous»**. This was revealed in reference to the people of the book. Hudhayfah and Ibn ‘Abbās said it is general in our regard, they said: ‘it is not disbelief that removes one from the faith if someone from this community were to commit it until they deny Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers and the final day.’¹¹

Imam al-Qurtubi (d. 671 AH), may Allah bestow His mercy upon him.

And Allah’s ﷻ saying: **«And he who does not judge according to what Allah has revealed, then they are the disbelievers»**. The apparent of this verse is cited by those who charge others with **unbelief** for the perpetration of sins and they are the **Khawārij**, and they have no proof for their claim from this verse. The reason being that these verses were revealed regarding the Jews who were distorting the words of Allah ﷻ, as has been narrated in the hadith literature, and they are disbelievers. Therefore, the one who shares with them the verdict is the one who shares with them the reason for the revelation.¹²

10- *Su‘alat Ibn Hani‘*, 2/192.

11- *Al-Tamhid*, 5/74.

12- *Al-Muḥḥim limā ‘Ushkila min Talkhis Muslim*, By Abū al-Abbās Ahmad al-Qurtubi, 2/116.

The Interpretation of the Scholars of the Muslim Community

The understanding of the majority of scholars of the Muslim community on this verse is that it means 'a disbelief other than absolute disbelief' (*kufr dūna kufr*), meaning that the one who does not rule by Allah's law will not disbelieve as a result of it. This is in agreement with the interpretation of the scholar of the Ummah, our master, 'Abd Allah b. 'Abbās. Some of the other scholars who held this opinion includes but is not limited to:

'Abd al-Razzāq b. Humām al-Ṣan'ānī	(d. 211 AH), <i>Tafsīr al-Ṣan'ānī</i> .
Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Ḥatīm al-Rāzī	(d. 277 AH), <i>Tafsīr Abī Ḥatīm</i> .
Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī	(d. 310 AH), <i>Jamī' al-Bayān</i> .
Aḥmad b. 'Alī Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, known as al-Jaṣṣās	(d. 370 AH), <i>Aḥkām al-Qur'an</i> .
Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Anṣārī al-Qurṭubī	(d. 671 AH), <i>al-Jamī' li Aḥkām al-Qur'an</i> .
Al-Imām Abū Muthaffar al-Sam'ānī	(d. 489 AH), <i>Tafsīr al-Sam'ānī</i> .
Muḥammad b. Naṣr al-Marwazī	(d. 516 AH), <i>Tā'thīm Qadr al-Salāh</i> .
'Abd al-Ḥāq b. 'Atayyah al-Andalusī	(d. 541 AH), <i>al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz</i> .
Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allah b. 'Arabī al-Ma'āfirī	(d. 543 AH), <i>Aḥkām al-Qur'an</i> .
Abū al-Farj b. al-Jawzī	(d. 597 AH), <i>Zad al-Maṣīr</i> .
Muḥammad b. 'Umar b. 'Alī al-Taymī al-Bakrī al-Rāzī	(d. 606 AH), <i>Tafsīr al-Rāzī</i> .
Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad b. 'Umar al-Qurṭubī	(d. 656 AH), <i>Al-Muḥtīm līmā 'Ushkila min Talkhīs Muslim</i> .
Al-Husayn b. Mas'ūd al-Baghawī	(d. 510 AH), <i>Ma'alim al-Tanzīl</i> .
'Abd Allah b. Aḥmad al-Nasaḥī	(d. 710 AH), <i>Tafsīr al-Nasaḥī</i> .
Aḥmad b. Taymiyyah	(d. 738 AH), <i>Fatāwa Ibn Taymiyyah</i> .
'Alī b. Muḥammad 'Ibrāhīm al-Shayḥī 'Alā' al-Dīn	(d. 741 AH), <i>Tafsīr al-Khazīn</i> .
Muḥammad b. Hayyān al-Andalusī al-Jayyānī al-Nafarī	(d. 745 AH), <i>Tafsīr al-Bahr al-Muḥīṭ</i> .
Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Juzayy al-Kalbī al-Ghuranāḥī	(d. 757 AH), <i>al-Tashīl fī 'Ulūm al-Tanzīl</i> .
Abū 'Ishāq 'Ibrāhīm b. Mūsā al-Shāḥībī	(d. 790 AH), <i>al-Muwāfaqāt</i> .
Ibn Abī al-'Izz al-Ḥanafī 'Alī b. 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Dimishqī	(d. 793 AH), <i>Sharḥ al-Taḥawīyyah</i> .
Al-Qāḍī Abū al-Sa'ūd	(d. 983 AH), <i>Tafsīr Abū al-Sa'ūd</i> .
Muḥammad 'Alī al-Shawkānī	(d. 1355 AH), <i>Fath al-Qadīr</i> .
Muḥammad Ṣiddīq Khān	(d. 1307 AH), <i>Fath al-Bayān fī Maqāṣid al-Qur'an</i> .
Aḥmad Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī	(d. 1371 AH), <i>Tafsīr al-Marāghī</i> .
Al-Sheikh 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Nāṣir al-Sa'dī	(d. 1376 AH), <i>Tafsīr al-Sa'dī</i> .
Muḥammad al-Amīn al-Shinqīṭī	(d. 1393 AH), <i>Tafsīr Adwa' al-Bayān</i> .

From among the contemporary authorities for the adherents of the ideology that declares anyone who does not rule by Allah's law as a disbeliever who reinforce the interpretation of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* on this verse - i.e. that it means 'a disbelief other than absolute disbelief' - and oppose the understanding of Mawdudi and the Qutbs, is the like of Albānī in '*Silsilat al-Ṣaḥīḥ*', vol. 6, p. 106, and Ibn 'Uthaymīn in '*al-Taḥṭṭir min Fitnat al-Takfīr*'¹³, p. 68.

In Summary

The scholars of the Muslim community, after their commentary on the mentioned verses and critique of its distorted interpretations, concluded:

The extreme and unorthodox interpretation of this verse has led to many things:

- That the distorted interpretations of the verses agree with the understanding of the *khawārij* of the first Islamic century.
- Whoever rules according to other than what Allah ﷻ has revealed purposely commits a form of disobedience and sin. Allah will take him to account for this and it is of the major sins.
- Whoever rules with other than Allah's law does not fall out of the fold of Islam.
- Whoever rules with other than Allah's law remains a Muslim whose blood is protected and forbidden to be shed.
- It is an obligation of the scholars to advise and guide the ruler to that which is superior and more virtuous.
- The exceeding of legal bounds by charging the rulers of the Muslims with disbelief.
- Labeling those who are content with the governance of such leaders, or resort to it for arbitration, or remain silent over it, as disbelievers.
- Opposing the understanding and interpretation of the pious predecessors (*salaf*) from amongst the companions, the generation of followers (*tabi'ūn*) and the scholars of the Muslim community - as can be clearly seen above.

In closing, a statement from the great Quranic scholar, Imam al Sam'āni: '...and know that the *khawārij* would infer from this verse that whoever does not judge according to what Allah has revealed then he is a disbeliever, whilst *Ahl al-Sunnah* assert that he does not fall into disbelief if he abandons ruling by divine law.'¹³

Introducing the Deviance Series

The Messenger of God ﷺ said:

‘This knowledge will be transmitted from every generation by its upright; they negate from it the distortions of the extreme, the false claims of the falsifiers, and interpretations of the ignorant.’

This is a *mashhūr* hadith, which was authenticated by Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, and it has been reported from Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal that he said: ‘it is an authentic hadith’.

Some of those that possess misapprehensions have understood the discourse of God in a manner which does not agree with the academic methodology inherited from the pious predecessors (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*), and does not harmonize with the objectives and greater values of the divine revelation...

They have taken some verses of the noble Qur’ān which were revealed in regard to the non-Muslims, and made them applicable to the Muslims...

They have adopted verses which came as exceptions and applied to them general rulings...

They have distorted the meanings of the words of God ﷻ in a manner that has led to the establishment or formation of grave erroneous concepts within the minds of the general Muslim populace, a result of which are mannerisms and actions that have no correlation with the true intrinsic religion of Islam...

We shall become acquainted through the parts of this continuous series about the distortions of the meanings of the verses of the Noble Qur’ān which the adherents of these distorted ideas have fallen within, and the extent of their departure from understanding the remarkable Prophet ﷺ and their distance from comprehending his companions and the splendid Sacred law in general...


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