
Criterion for the excuse of ignorance 1

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Those of our fathers and grandfathers who have passed away and who used to recite the Qur'aan but were ignorant of its meaning, and who used to be upon the belief that it was ok to call upon the dead and things similar to that which occur [nowadays], and then they passed away and it became clear to us [later] that this thing is not permissible, so what is the situation as regards to supplicating [du'aa] [for them], shall we supplicate for them or not? [Bearing in mind] that they didn't know, they didn't know the reality, the scholars who were present with them were the ones who directed them to this thing, that this is religion and nothing other than it.

Shaykh al-Albaanee, (rahimahullaah)¹: As long as they upheld the pillars of Islaam [Arkaan al-Islaam] then you should supplicate for them, because you do not know what was in their hearts.

What is the criterion as regards the excuse of ignorance concerning Tawheed and is reading and reciting the Qur'aan enough to take away this excuse?

Shaykh al-Albaanee, (rahimahullaah): The criterion, whether he can recite the Qur'aan firstly and understand it secondly, or he reads it but does not understand it, or he can neither understand nor read it— then the criterion concerning [all] this is that the Muslim lives in a true Islaamic environment in which the [correct Islaamic] creed be widespread such that it becomes what the scholars of usool call 'that which is necessarily known about the religion [it being so common].'

And maybe all of those present [in this gathering] remember the hadeeth of the slave girl who used to herd sheep for a man in Uhud, and the [time when a] wolf attacked the sheep ... so when news reached him [i.e., the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم)²] the man said, "I get angry like [any] man does and so I struck her once."

So the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said—and it was upon this that he freed her ... he (صلى الله عليه وسلم) ordered him to bring her and asked her—"Where is Allaah?" She replied, "Above the heavens." He said, "Who am I?" She said, "You are the Messenger of Allaah." To which he replied, "Free her, for verily she is a believer."

So the point taken from this hadeeth is [that this fact, i.e.,] that Allaah, the Mighty and Majestic, is above the Heavens is a Qur'aanic creed, taken from the text of the Qur'aan in more than one unequivocal aayah and is a prophetic, Sunni creed which occurs in very many hadeeths.

But nowadays many Islaamic societies do not have the correct Islaamic creed and thus a man living in such an environment is excused/has an excuse, because the proof has not reached him as opposed to someone living in a different society in which the creed of monotheism [Tawheed] is widespread and prevalent and which resembles the first prophetic society; one in which that slave girl who was a shepherdess was and she knew this Islaamic creed.

¹ (rahimahullaah) (رَحِمَهُ اللَّهُ) May Allaah have mercy on him

² (صلى الله عليه وسلم) May the peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him

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Did she study the Qur'aan? Did she study the hadeeth of the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم)? That is something which is normally far-fetched for a shepherd[ess] to do. But she lived in a house in which she could hear and gain understanding at the hands of her master and his wife, and so she learnt that which she did not know beforehand.

And when we add the Saying of Allaah, the Blessed and Most High, to this hadeeth and this meaning, [which is], **“And We never punish until We have sent a Messenger [to warn],”**³, and we understand this noble aayah correctly, not with a rigid understanding [based solely] upon its wording without looking at its objective and meaning ... and what I mean is that this aayah, i.e., **“... until We have sent a Messenger ...”** does not just mean that a Messenger will come to every group or sect in all ages. [But rather that] maybe a Messenger would come or the call of the Messenger will come.

The important thing is [to know] that the aayah does not only refer to the Messenger himself in person but is referring to his call. From the proofs of this is that a Messenger may go to a nation in which there is an insane person, or someone possessed, or someone who hasn't reached puberty, or a deaf person and so on ... so [if that happened then] a Messenger would have come to these people [physically] but his call would not have.

And the opposite of that is our example, the followers of Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم), Prophet Muhammad (صلى الله عليه وسلم) didn't come to us directly but his call did and so whoever this call reached in its purity and upon its reality then the proof would have reached him and he would not have the excuse of ignorance based upon what I just explained now.

Upon this I have said more than once that many of the Europeans and Americans have been tried and tested with callers who have deviated from the Book and the Sunnah, such as the Qadyaneeas for example, because this is a group which is extremely active in calling to that which they believe in from their religion. And only because of that were they able to influence thousands of English people, Germans, Americans and so on.

You see, and here is the point, did the proof of Islaam reach these people who followed the call of the Qadyaneeas?

The answer is no, the proof of the Qadyaneeas reached them and not that of Islaam. So with Allaah is the perfect proof and argument and [the establishment of this perfect proof and argument] is the condition upon which someone is counted as being from amongst those who have the obligation to respond to the message, whether that be positive or negative.

Thus the criterion is that the correct call reaches the people: so whoever it does reach then the proof has been established against him and whoever it doesn't reach then it hasn't been established.

But that which regulates this subject is to pay attention to the society which these individuals live in. So if the society is one of the Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jamaa'ah as they would say in the past [with the old meaning of this term]—because we do not [agree with the way] this term is used in modern times, because in the usage of the blind-followers it only means the Ash'arees and the Maaturidees—whereas we mean those whom the Salafee call, and that which the Salaf as-Saalih were upon, has reached; it would be against such a person that the proof would have been established.

But I believe that there are few such people in the entire Islaamic world, and I think that this suffices for an answer.⁴

³ Soorah al-Israa 17:15

⁴ *Mawsoo'atul-Allaamah, al-Imaam, Mujaddidil-Asr, Muhammad Naasirid-Deen al-Albaanee*, of Shaykh Shady Noaman, vol. 5, pp. 735-737 and the first question is from p. 772.