

The Sunnah: Status and Authority

Our discussion of the Sunnah is a discussion of the second source of Islamic legislation. Muslim scholars and Jurists have unanimously agreed on the authority of the Prophetic Sunnah and that obeying the Prophet (PBUH) is an aspect of our obedience to Allah (Glory be to Him). The almighty Allah says, "You who believe, obey God and the Messenger, and those in authority among you. If you are in dispute over any matter, refer it to God and the Messenger, if you truly believe in God and the Last Day: that is better and fairer in the end." (The Quran, 4: 59)

Allah also says, "And obey God and the Prophet so that you may be given mercy." (The Quran, 3: 132)

Allah also says, "Say, 'Obey God and the Messenger,' but if they turn away, [know that] God does not love the disbelievers." (The Quran, 3: 32)

Allah also says, "Obey God and His Messenger, and do not quarrel with one another, or you may lose heart and your spirit may desert you. Be steadfast: God is with the steadfast." (The Quran, 8: 46)

The Quran also reads, "Obey God, obey the Messenger, and always be on your guard: if you pay no heed, bear in mind that the sole duty of Our Messenger is to deliver the message clearly." (The Quran, 5: 92)

Allah also tells us, "Say, 'Obey God; obey the Messenger. If you turn away, [know that] he is responsible for the duty placed upon him, and you are responsible for the duty placed upon you. If you obey him, you will be rightly guided, but the Messenger's duty is only to deliver the message clearly.'" (The Quran, 24: 54)

Allah also says, "Whoever obeys the Messenger obeys God. If some pay no heed, We have not sent you to be their keeper." (The Quran, 4: 80)

The Quran also says, "Whoever obeys God and the Messenger will be among those He has blessed: the messengers, the truthful, those who bear witness to the truth, and

the righteous- what excellent companions these are! That is God's favour. No one knows better than Him." (The Quran, 4: 69-70)

Allah also says, "Whoever obeys God and His Messenger will truly achieve a great triumph." (The Quran, 33: 71)

Allah also says, "God will admit those who obey Him and His Messenger to Gardens graced with flowing streams, and there they will stay- that is the supreme triumph!" (The Quran, 4: 13)

Allah also says, "God will admit anyone who obeys Him and His Messenger to Gardens graced with flowing streams; He will painfully punish anyone who turns away." (The Quran, 48: 17)

Allah also says, "When the true believers are summoned to God and His Messenger in order for him to judge between them, they say, 'We hear and we obey.' These are the ones who will prosper: whoever obeys God and His Messenger stands in awe of God, and keeps his duty to Him will be triumphant." (The Quran, 24: 51-52)

Allah also says, "All the messengers We sent were meant to be obeyed, by God's leave. If only [the hypocrites] had come to you [Prophet] when they wronged themselves, and begged God's forgiveness, and the Messenger had asked forgiveness for them, they would have found that God accepts repentance and is most merciful." (The Quran, 4: 64)

Allah also says, "So accept whatever the Messenger gives you, and abstain from whatever he forbids you. Be mindful of God: God is severe in punishment." (The Quran, 59: 7)

The Quran stresses the necessity of acting according to the judgment of the Prophet (PBUH) during his lifetime, and acting according to his Sunnah after his death.

Allah says, "By your Lord, they will not be true believers until they let you decide between them in all matters of dispute, and find no resistance in their souls to your decisions, accepting them totally." (The Quran, 4: 65) Allah also says, "When God and His Messenger have decided on a matter that concerns them, it is not fitting for any believing man or woman to claim freedom of choice in that matter: whoever disobeys God and His Messenger is far astray." (The Quran, 33: 36)

Allah has forbidden and warned against disobeying the Prophet (PBUH) saying, "Those who go against his order should beware lest a trial afflicts them or they receive a painful punishment." (The Quran, 24: 63)

Allah also says, "O believers, obey God and the Messenger: do not let your deeds go to waste." (The Quran, 47: 33)

Allah also says, "O believers, obey God and His Messenger: do not turn away when you are listening to him; do not be like those who say, 'We heard,' though in fact they were not listening- the worst creatures in God's eyes are those who are [wilfully] deaf and dumb, who do not reason. If God had known there was any good in them, He would have made them hear, but even if He had, they would still have turned away and taken no notice." (The Quran, 8: 20-23)

Allah also says, "Whoever disobeys God and His Messenger is far astray." (The Quran, 33: 36)

Allah also says, "But those who disobey God and His Messenger and overstep His limits will be consigned by God to the Fire, and there they will stay- a humiliating torment awaits them!" (The Quran, 4: 14)

Allah also says, "Whoever disobeys God and His Messenger will have Hell's Fire as his permanent home." (The Quran, 72: 23)

The Almighty Allah states that any guidance from the Prophet (PBUH) is Divine revelation. The Quran states, "By the star when it sets! Your companion has not strayed; he is not deluded; he does not speak from his own desire. The Quran is nothing less than a revelation that is sent to him." (The Quran, 53: 1-4) The Quran also states that when the Prophet (PBUH) calls us to something, he calls us to what gives us life. The Quran reads, "Believers, respond to God and His Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life. Know that God comes between a man and his heart, and that you will be gathered to Him." (The Quran, 8: 24)

Obedying the commands of the Prophet (PBUH) and acting according to his Sunna is a means to get Allah's pleasure and love and a way to forgive one's sins. Allah says, "Say, 'If you love God, follow me, and God will love you and forgive you your sins; God is most forgiving, most merciful.'" (The Quran, 3: 31)

The Prophet (PBUH) said, “Lo! Soon that a Hadith from me will be conveyed to a man, while he is reclining on his couch, and he says: 'Between us and you is Allah's Book. So whatever we find in it that is lawful, we consider lawful, and whatever we find in it that is unlawful, we consider it unlawful.' Indeed whatever the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) made unlawful, it is the same as what Allah made unlawful.”¹ He (PBUH) also said, “Leave me as I leave you, for the people who were before you were ruined because of their questions and their differences over their prophets. So, if I forbid you to do something, then keep away from it. And if I order you to do something, then do of it as much as you can.”² He also said, “Every one of my Ummah will enter Jannah except those who refuse”. He was asked: "Who will refuse?" He (PBUH) said, "Whoever obeys me, shall enter Jannah, and whosoever disobeys me, refuses to (enter Jannah).”³

Abd Allah Ibn Abbas (May Allah be pleased with him) narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) said, “O people, indeed, I have left among you, that which if you hold fast to it, you shall not go astray: The Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Prophet.”⁴

Also Al-Irbad Ibn Sariyah narrated that the Prophet (PBUH) said, “I admonish you to fear Allah, to listen and obey even if an Abyssinian slave is appointed as your leader. Because whosoever among you shall live after me, will see much discord. So hold fast to my Sunnah and the examples of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs who will come after me. Adhere to them and hold to it fast. Beware of new things (in religion) because every *Bid'ah* is a misguidance.”⁵

¹ Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan*, Book of Knowledge, Chapter: What is forbidden to say when mentioning a Hadith of the Prophet (PBUH), ed. Ahmad Muhammad Shakir, Al-Halabi Library, Egypt, 2nd edition, (1395 A.H.-1975 C.E.), Hadith No. 2664,

² Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, Book of Adherence to the Quran and Sunnah, Chapter: Following the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH), ed. Muhammad Zuhair Ibn Nassir, Dar Tawq Al-Najah publishing House, 1st edition (1422 A.H.), Hadith no. 7288.

³ Ibid, Hadith no. 7280.

⁴ Al-Hakim, *Al-Mustadrak 'ala Al-Sahihayn*, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah, Beirut, Vol.1, P. 171, Hadith no. 318.

⁵ Abu Dawud, Book of Al-Sunnah, Chapter: Adherence to the Sunnah, ed. Muhammad Mohey Al-Din Abd AlHamid, Al-Asriyyah Library, Beirut, Hadith no. 4607.

Another Hadith reads, “Whoever turns away from my Sunnah is not of me.”⁶ And also another Hadith says, “Whosoever obeys me, obeys Allah; and he who disobeys me, disobeys Allah.”⁷

Ibn Abbas said, "Three verses have been revealed, each one of them combines two things which must be accepted together; neglecting one of those two things means neglecting the other. The first verse is 'Obey Allah and obey His Messenger' (The Quran, 4:59); thus obeying Allah without obeying His Messenger is not accepted. The second verse is 'Perform prayer and pay Zakah' (The Quran: 2: 43); thus whoever performs Prayer but neglects paying Zakah, his Prayer is not accepted. The Third verse is Allah's saying, 'And Thank Me and your parents' (The Quran 31: 14); thus whoever thanks Allah and behaves badly to his parents, his thank to Allah is not accepted. This is why the Prophet (PBUH) said, 'Allah's pleasure lies in the pleasure of the parent. Allah's displeasure lies in the displeasure of the parent.'"⁸

Ibn Rajab Al-Hanabali⁹ reported from Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal¹⁰ that he said, “The Rules of Islam revolve around three Ahadith: “Actions are by their intentions”, “If anyone introduces in our matter something which does not belong to it, will be rejected; and the Hadith of Al-Numan Ibn Bashir that “The lawful is clear and the unlawful is clear.”¹¹

Also Abu Dawud Al-Sijistany¹² said, “Fiqh centers on five Ahadith: “The lawful is clear and the unlawful is clear”; “There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm”; “Actions are by their intentions” "Religion is *naseehah* (advice, sincerity).”;

⁶ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, Book of Marriage, Chapter: Awakening the desire for marriage, Hadith no. 5063; Muslim, *Sahih*, Book of Marriage, Chapter: the Desirability of Marriage, Hadith no. 1401.

⁷ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih*, Book of Judgments, Chapter: Allah's Saying, "Obey Allah and Obey the Messenger", Hadith no. 7137; Muslim, *Sahih*, Book of Leadership, Chapter: The obligation of obeying rulers except in doing sins, Hadith no. 1835.

⁸ Al-Bayhaqi, *Shu'ab Al-Iman*, Chapter: Parental Gratitude, Vol. 6, p. 177, Hadith no. 7830.

⁹ Abu Al-Faraj Zayn Al-Din Ibn Ahmad Ibn Rajab Al-Salami Al-Baghdadi, known as "Ibn Rajab". He was born in Baghdad in 736 A.H. He was a prolific Hadith scholar and a leading Hanbali jurist. Among his most important works are: *Jami' Al-'Ulum wa Al-Hikam* and *Lata'if al-Ma'arif*. He died in Damascus in 795 A.H. See: *Al-A'lam* by Al-Zirkily, 3/295, Dar Al-Ilm, 15th edition, 2002.

¹⁰ He is Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Hanbal Al-Shaybani. He was born in Baghdad in 164 A.H. He is the fourth of the main four Jurists of Ahl Al-Sunnah wa Al-Jama'ah, and the founder of the Hanbali School of Islamic law. See: *Siyar A'lam Al-Nubala'* by Al-Dhahabi (d. 749 A.H.), 11/177, ed. Shu'ayb Al-Arna'ut et al, Mu'assat Al-Risalah, 3rd edition, 1405A.H./1985 C.E.

¹¹ Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali, *Jami' Al-'Ulum wa Al-Hikam*, 1/61, Dar Al-Ma'rifah, Beirut.

¹² Imam Abu Dawud. His full name is: Sulayman Ibn Al-Ash'ath Ibn Ishaq Ibn Bashir Al-Azdi Al-Sijistani. The Imam of Hadith during his time. He is the author of book "*Al-Sunan*", one of the major six collections of Hadith. He died in Basra in 275 A.H. (See: *Siyar A'lam Al-Nubala'*, 13/203; and *Al-A'lam* by Al-Zirkli, 3/122).

and "Refrain from what I forbid you and do what I command you to the best of your ability and capacity."¹³

None shall doubt the status and authority of the Sunnah except an obstinate whose views are valueless. Scholars have agreed that Sunnah is the Second source of Islamic legislation. Therefore, scholars have paid much attention to preserve it either through memorization, narration, documentation, referencing, explanation, and deducing rulings.

However, some people may sometimes stick to the literal meaning without searching for the deep purposes of the text. This creates close-mindedness in many issues. This is why it came to be necessary to speak about the *Maqasidi* understanding of the Sunnah to combat intellectual abstinence and close-mindedness.

Sunnah is an explanation to The Quran. Allah Glory be to Him says, "We sent them with clear signs and scriptures. We have sent down the message to you too [Prophet], so that you can explain to people what was sent for them, so that they may reflect." (The Quran, 16: 44) And Allah also says, "God has sent down the Scripture and Wisdom to you, and taught you what you did not know. God's bounty to you is great indeed." (The Quran, 4: 113) Allah also says, "It is He who raised a Messenger, among the people who had no Scripture, to recite His revelations to them, to make them grow spiritually and teach them the Scripture and wisdom—before that they were clearly astray." (The Quran, 62: 2) Allah also says, "Remember the favour He blessed you with, and the Scripture and wisdom He sent to teach you. Be mindful of God and know that He has full knowledge of everything." (The Quran 2: 231) Allah also says, "Remember what is recited in your houses of God's revelations and wisdom, for God is all subtle, all aware." (The Quran, 33: 34)

Al-Hasan Al-Basri¹⁴ and Imam Al-Shafi'i¹⁵ and other scholars said that the meaning of "wisdom" here is the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH).¹⁶

¹³ Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali, *Jami' Al-'Ulum wa Al-Hikam*, p. 62.

¹⁴ His full name is: Al-Hasan Ibn Yasar Al-Basri. He is from the generation of "*Tabi'un*" (the generation after the Companions of the Prophet (PBUH)). He was the most prominent Imam in Basra at his time. He died in 110 A.H. (*Al-A'lam* by Al-Zirkli, 2/226).

¹⁵ His full name is: Muhammad Ibn Idris Al-Shafi'i Al-Qurashi. He is the third of the main four leading Muslim jurists for Ahl Al-Sunnah and the founder of the Shafi'i school of Islamic Law. He was born in Gaza in 150 A.H. Among his most important works are: *Al-Umm* and *Al-Risalah* which is the first book

Scholars of *Fiqh* and *Usul* have elaborated and expounded on the authority of the Sunnah. Imam Al-Shafi'i said, "Allah (glory be to Him) has placed His Prophet (PBUH) in a position regarding His religion, obligations and Book to be a guide towards the Religion of Allah though commanding us to obey him and prohibiting disobeying him. Allah also combines the obedience to Him along with the obedience to the Prophet as Allah says, "The true believers are the ones who have faith in God and His Messenger and leave all doubt behind, the ones who have struggled with their possessions and their persons in God's way: they are the ones who are true. (The Quran, 49: 15). Thus Allah makes the first step in belief is to believe in Allah and His Messenger."¹⁷

He also says, "I never heard of any reliable scholar negating that Allah obliged the obedience of the Prophet (PBUH) and the submission to his judgement, and that all those who come after the Prophet must obey him. No opinion may be followed except through the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH). All other sources are dependent on them."¹⁸

Ibn Hazm¹⁹ says, "Where in The Quran can we find that the *Zuhr* prayer is of four *rak'ahs* or that the *Maghrib* is of three *raka'ahs*? Or what is the description of *Ruku'* and *sujud*; the description of recitation in the Prayer; what to avoid during fasting, the scales of *Zakah* of gold, silver and livestock?; the acts of Pilgrimage...the rulings of breastfeeding, the description of the punishment of thieves?; the rulings of transactions and other branches of *Fiqh*? The Quran includes general statements that if we are left to, we will not be able to completely understand and act upon. The reference in all of these rules is the Sunnah of the Prophet (PBUH)."²⁰

written on *Usul Al-Fiqh* (Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence). He died in Egypt in 204 A.H. (See: *Al-A'lam* by Al-Zirkli, 6/26).

¹⁶ See the Exegesis of the Quran by Al-Tabari and Ibn Kathir in their commentary on the verse no. 2 of the Chapter "Al-Baqarah".

¹⁷ Al-Shafi'i, *Al-Risalah*, ed. Ahmad Shakir, 1/75, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah, Beirut.

¹⁸ Al-Shafi'i, *Al-Umm*, Book of "Knowledge", 2/287, Dar Al-Ma'rifah, Beirut.

¹⁹ His full name is: Abu Muhammad Ali Ibn Sa'id Ibn Hazm Al-Andalusi Al-Qurtubi. He is one of the prominent scholars of Andalusia. Among his most important works are: *Al-Muhalla*, *Al-Fisal fi Al-Milal wa Al-Ahwa' wa Al-Nihal*, *Al-Ihkam fi Usul Al-Ahkam* and *Tawq Al-Hamamh*. He died in 456 A.H./1064 C.E. (See: *Al-A'lam* by Al-Zirkili, 4/254).

²⁰ Ibn Hazm, *Al-Ihkam fi Usul Al-Ahkam*, 2/79, Dar Al-Afaq Al-Jadidah, Beirut.

Al-Shawkany²¹ says, "Be aware that all reliable scholars have agreed that the Sunnah is an independent source of legislation; it is like The Quran in proving permissibility or impermissibility of something. It has been authentically reported that the Prophet (PBUH) said, 'Verily, I have been given the Quran and something along with it'²² that is, I have given The Quran and along it the Sunnah which is not mentioned in the Quran. This includes the prohibition of eating donkeys, the prohibition of eating fanged beasts of prey, and all the birds having talons, etc."²³ He adds, "The conclusion is that the authority of the Sunnah and its independence in legislation is a emphatically proven, and none disagree on this except the renegades".²⁴

Al-Alusi²⁵ says, "(Obey Allah) means to abide by His commands and avoid His prohibitions; (obey the Messenger) as he is sent to you to convey Allah's commands to you. The Quran repeats the verb "obey" again as a sign of stressing the status of the Prophet and to negate any claim that it is not obligatory to follow the Prophet's commands which are not mentioned in the Quran. This indicates that the Prophet has the right of obedience independently of the obedience to the Quran, which is not granted to any other human being."²⁶

Abdulawahaab Khallaf²⁷ says, "Sunnah may explain and elucidate on ambiguous commands of the Quran; restrict its absolute commands and limit its general ones. Thus, this explanation, restriction and limitation by the Sunnah is an elucidation on the Quran, as Allah has granted the Prophet the right to explain the text of the Quran as Allah says, "And We have sent down to you 'O Prophet' the Reminder, so that you may explain to people what has been revealed for them." (The Quran, 16: 44) This

²¹ His full name is: Muhamamd Ibn Ali Ibn Muhammad Ibn Abd Allah Al-Shawkani; a prominent Yemini Jurist. Among his works are: *Nayl Al-Awtar* and *Fath Al-Qadir*. He died in San'a in 1759 A.H./1834 C.E. (See: *Al-A'lam* by Al-Zirkili, 6/298).

²² Musnad Ahmad (Hadith no. 17174)

²³ Al-Shawkani, *Irshad Al-Fuhul Ela Tahqiq Al-Haq Min 'Ilm Al-Usul*, 1/96, Dar Al-Kitab Al-Arabi.

²⁴ Ibid, 1/96.

²⁵ His full name is: Mahmud Shihab Al-Din Al-Alusi. He is from the island of Alus in the river of Al-Furat. He was a scholar of Tafsir, Hadith, Islamic Jurisprudence, literature. He was appointed as the Grand Mufti in his hometown in 1248 A.H. Among his works is his Exegesis of the Quran "*Rawh Al-Ma'ani*". He died in 1270 A.H./1854 C.E. (See: *Al-A'lam* by Al-Zirkili, 7/172).

²⁶ Al-Alusi, *Rawh Al-Ma'ani fi Tafsir Al-Quran Al-'Azim*, 5/65, Ihya' Al-Turath Al-Arabi, Beirut.

²⁷ He is a scholar of Hadith and Islamic Jurisprudence. He was also a member of the Academy of Arabic Language in Cairo. He was born in 1888. He wrote many books especially on the principles of Islamic Jurisprudence. He was appointed as a judge in Shari'ah courts in 1920. In 1942, he was appointed as a head of Mosques Sector in the Ministry of Endowments. Then in 1931, he was appointed as a supervisor in Shari'ah courts. He was delegated as a lecturer to the Faculty of Law in early 1934, till his pension in 1948. H died in 1375 A.H. (See his biography in the introduction to his book "*Ilm Usul Al-Fiqh wa Khulasat Tarikh al-Tashri'*", p. 3).

includes the Sunnah explaining the details of Prayer, Zakah and Hajj as the Quran does not detail the *rak'ahs* of Prayer, amounts of Zakah, or rituals of Hajj. Also Allah says, "Allah has permitted trading and forbidden usury." (The Quran 2: 257) It is the Sunnah that explained the valid and invalid sales, the types of prohibited *Riba* (usury). The Quran prohibits eating dead animals, while the Sunnah excludes fish, and many other Ahadith that explain the general terms of the Quran, the absolute, and therefore it cannot be separated from the Quran."²⁸

Drawing on all the above quoted Qur'anic verse, Ahadith, and scholarly statements, it becomes clear why scholars unanimously agreed on the status of the Sunnah, and its authority in explaining the Quran and detailing its rules. None shall deny this except those denying the truth and the ignorant who has no weight in scholarly arguments.

²⁸ Abd Al-Wahhab Khallaf, *Ilm Usul Al-Fiqh*, Mtba'at Al-Madani, Egypt, p. 40.