

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

العذر بالجهل في الأمور العقيدة
من فتاوى شيخ صالح بن فوزان الفوزان و الشيخ ابن باز

Is ignorance an **excuse** in matters of Aqeedah?

as explained by Shaikh Abdul-Aziz ibn Baz (rahimahullah)
and Shaikh Salih ibn Fawzan al-Fawzan (hafidhahullah)

Compiled and Translated by Shawana A. Aziz



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Who are the ones who will be excused for ignorance about Aqeedah and matters of Fiqh?

Shaikh Abdul-Aziz bin Baz (rahimahullah) replied,

"Praise be to Allah. Claiming that one is ignorant or using ignorance as an excuse is a matter which needs further discussion. Not everyone can be excused for his ignorance.

With regard to Islamic teachings that have been explained by the Messenger ﷺ clarified in the Book of Allah and are widely known among the Muslims, then no claim of ignorance is accepted, especially in matters related to Aqeedah and the basics of religion.

Allah sent His Prophet ﷺ to teach the people their religion and explain it to them, and he ﷺ indeed conveyed the message clearly and explained to the Ummah the truths of their religion. He explained everything and left them with a clear path which is always obvious...

If some people claim to be ignorant about things which are known to be essential parts of the religion, and which are well known among the Muslims, such as claiming to be ignorant about Shirk and worshipping anything other than Allah, or claiming that Salaat is not obligatory, or that fasting Ramadan is not obligatory, or that paying Zakaat is not obligatory, or that performing Hajj when one is able to, is not obligatory - in these and similar matters, claims of ignorance are unacceptable... These are known to be essential parts of the Muslim's religion and are widely known among the Muslims, so claiming ignorance is not acceptable.

The ruling is also the same with regards to a person claiming that he does not know that what the Mushrikeen do at the graves or idols is wrong, when they call upon the dead, seek their help, offer sacrifices to them and make vows to them, or offer sacrifices to the idols, stars, trees or rocks; or seek healing or help against their enemies from the dead or idols or jinn or angels or Prophets. Because it is clearly and essentially known in the religion that they are all major Shirk.

Allah clearly explained this in His Book, and His Messenger ﷺ clarified it. He ﷺ remained in Makkah for thirteen years warning the people against this Shirk, and he preached the same message in al-Madina for ten years, explaining to them that it is obligatory for their worship to be purely and sincerely for Allah Alone, and reciting to them the Book of Allah, such as the verses, "Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him." [Soorah al-Isra (17): 23]

...The same applies in the case of those who make fun of the religion, attack it, mock it and insult it - all of these are forms of major Kufr and are things for which none may be excused on the grounds of ignorance, because it is well-known in the religion that insulting the religion or insulting the Messenger ﷺ are forms of major Kufr, as is making fun of the religion or mocking it. Allah says, "Say, 'Was it at Allah, and His Ayaat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) and His Messenger that you were mocking? Make no excuse; you have disbelieved after you had believed.'" [Soorah at-Tawbah (9): 65-66]

It is obligatory for the scholars in every place to spread this knowledge among the people and to make it known so that the common people will have no excuse and so that this important knowledge will become widespread among them; and so that they will give up their attachment to the dead and seeking help from them...

The silence of the scholars is one of the reasons for the loss and ignorance of the common people. The scholars, wherever they are, must convey to the people the religion of Allah, and teach them about the Oneness of Allah (Tawheed) and the kinds of shirk, so that they will give up shirk out of understanding, and so that they will worship Allah Alone with understanding.

Similarly, they must speak out against the things that happen at the grave of al-Badawi, the grave of al-Husayn ؑ, or at the grave of Shaikh Abdul-Qaadir al-Jeelani or at the grave of the Prophet ﷺ in al-Madina and at other graves. The people must know that worship is for Allah alone, and no one else has any right to it, as Allah says, "They were commanded not, but that they should worship Allah, and worship none but Him Alone (abstaining from ascribing partners to Him)." [Soorah al-Bayyinah (98): 5]

...With regards to matters which may be unclear, such as some transactions and some matters of prayer and fasting, the one who is ignorant of them may be excused, as the Prophet ﷺ excused the man who entered ihraam dressed in a cloak and wearing perfume. The Prophet ﷺ said to him, "Take off the cloak and wash off the perfume, and do in your umrah what you do in your Hajj." He did not tell him to pay a penalty (fidyah) for his ignorance. Similarly, some matters which may be unclear should be taught to the one who is ignorant, so that he will come to understand them.

But as far as the basics of Aqeedah, the pillars of Islam, and things which are clearly Haraam are concerned, claims of ignorance cannot be accepted from anyone who lives among the Muslims. If anyone who lives among the Muslims were to say, 'I did not know that adultery is haraam,' this is no excuse. If he were to say, 'I did not know that disobeying my parents is haraam,' this is no excuse. Rather he should be punished and disciplined. Or if he were to say, 'I did not know that homosexuality is haraam,' this is no excuse. These are matters, which are clear and well known among the Muslims and in Islam.

But if he lived in a land far away from the Muslim world or in remote parts of Africa where there are no Muslims around him, then the claim of ignorance may be accepted from him, and if he dies in that state, his case will rest with Allah; he will come under the same ruling as those who lived during the fatrah (time between two Prophets). The correct view is that they will be tested on the Day of Resurrection, if they respond and obey they will enter Paradise, and if they disobey, they will enter Hell.

But the one, who lived among the Muslims and did actions of Kufr, and neglected the well-known obligations, he has no excuse, because the matter is clear and there are Muslims around him, who fast and perform Hajj. All of this is well-known and widespread among the Muslims, so the claim of ignorance in this case is a false claim. And Allah is the One Whose help we seek." [Kitab Majmoo Fatawa wa Maqalat Mutnawwi'ah li Samaahat (7/132)]

The Knowledge of Aqeedah at-Tawheed First

In light of the above reply of Shaikh ibn Baz, it becomes explicitly clear that Aqeedah is the first matter, which is obligatory for a person to have knowledge of. Aa'isha (radhi allahu anha) explains how Allah primarily revealed verses that cultivated and strengthened the Aqeedah of the Sahabah, and the rulings concerning the various religious duties and prohibitions were revealed later, she (radhi allahu anha) states, "The first thing that was revealed thereof was a Soorah from al-Mufassal, and in it was mentioned Paradise and the Fire. When the people embraced Islam, the verses regarding legal and illegal things were revealed.

If the first thing to be revealed was, 'Do not drink alcoholic drinks,' people would have said, 'We will never leave alcoholic drinks.'

If there had been revealed, 'Do not commit adultery,' they would have said, 'We will never give up adultery.' While I was a young girl of playing age, the following verse was revealed in Mecca to Muhammad ﷺ 'Nay! But the Hour is their appointed time (for their full recompense), and the Hour will be more grievous and more bitter.'" [Soorah al-Qamar (54): 46] [Saheeh al-Bukharee (6/515)]

The saying of Abdullah ibn Umar ؓ further elaborates the issue, he said, "We lived during a time, in which one of us would receive faith first, before receiving the Qur'aan, and when the soorahs were revealed, we would learn what they permitted and what they prohibited, and what they forbade, and what they ordered, and what should be the stance towards them.

But I have seen many men from whom one is given the Qur'aan before faith, and he reads it from the opening of the Book to its closing, and he does not know what it orders and what it forbids, and what should be his stance towards it. He is like someone, who is just throwing out dates [i.e., he does not get any benefit from his recital]."

The first issue of Aqeedah that needs to be learned is Aqeeqah at-Tawheed, since it is the first pillar of Islam, and one does not enter Islam without it. When Allah's Messenger ﷺ sent Muadh bin Jabal ؓ to the land of Yemen, he advised him to initiate his Dawah with the teachings of Aqeedah, which if accepted, then he should proceed with the obligations of Islam. He ﷺ instructed him saying,

"You are going to a people from the People of the Book. Let the first thing that you call them to be, (Oneness of) Allah's worship. If they acknowledge Allah (i.e., His Oneness), then inform them that Allah has obligated upon them five prayers during their days and nights." [Saheeh al-Bukharee and Saheeh Muslim]

Question: Some Muslims have fallen into acts of shirk or they utter words of Shirk as a result of ignorance that these acts and statements are against Islam. Are they excused due to their ignorance? What is required from the students of knowledge and scholars with regards to these people in matters related to Aqeedah and others?

Reply by Shaikh Salih ibn Fawzan al-Fawzan,

"He, who has fallen into acts of shirk or statements of shirk, while he is in a Muslim society and he is capable of questioning the scholars, and read the Qur'aan and the Ahaadeeth and listen to the sayings of the people of knowledge, then he is not excused for what he has fallen into, because the Dawah has reached him and the Hujjah has been established upon him.

As far as someone who is far away from the Islamic state is concerned and he lives in a country of Jahilyah (ignorance) or in a society that does not know anything about Islam then he is excused due to his ignorance, because the Hujjah has not been established upon him, but if the Dawah reaches him and he knows his mistake then it is obligatory upon him to make Tawbah (repentance) to Allah.

Nowadays, with the advancement of information technology and proximity of countries due to speedy means of communication, there is no one to whom the Dawah has not reached except some rare cases. Because the awareness (of Islam) has spread in every developed territory in a way that the Hujjah has been established.

But the problem is that most of the people who have fallen in Shirk al-Akbar live in mainland Islamic states, and amongst them are scholars and they do not accept the Dawah of Tawheed, rather they turn away from it, and they abandon the Dawah of Tawheed by giving it the worst names, and this is a great problem.

What is obligatory on the scholars is to establish the Dawah of Tawheed that which the Messengers called towards, and warn against what contradicts it from Shirk, and explain what some societies have fallen into Shirk al-Akbar, and explain its causes until the Hujjah is established and Allah guides whomsoever He wills.

If the scholars keep quite and submit to the prevailing occurrences, or direct their Dawah to other side issues and leave the fundamental issues as what some groups do who associate themselves with Dawah nowadays, then this does not benefit at all, and is not considered Dawah to Islam.' [Muntaqa min Fatawa Shaikh Fawzan, question no.37, p. 44]

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