



108581 - Is it possible for the Muslims to be united despite the differences between them in creed and methodology?

the question

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Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

I.

Differences between people with regard to creed and methodology is something natural, and Allah, may He be Exalted, has told us that this is something that happens among people. He has told us that He is able to unite them all on one religion, but there is great wisdom in His not doing that: so that He may reward the obedient who affirm His oneness and punish the disobedient and those who ascribe partners to Him. If Allah, may He be Exalted, had made all people one nation, the virtue of Tawheed and those who affirm His oneness would not be apparent, and the abhorrent nature of sin and sinners would not be apparent. Allah has wisdom which dictates that there should be differences which would lead to His names and attributes being manifested in His creation.

Allah, may He be exalted, says:

{And if your Lord had willed, He could have made mankind one community; but they will not cease to differ,

Except those on whom your Lord has mercy, and for that He created them. But the word of your Lord is to be fulfilled that, "I will surely fill Hell with jinn and men all together"} [Hud 11:118-119].



Ibn Jarir at-Tabari (may Allah have mercy on him) said: If your Lord had willed, O Muhammad, He would have made all people one group, following one path and one religion.

Tafsir at-Tabari, 15/531.

Al-Hafiz Ibn Kathir (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Here Allah, may He be Exalted, tells us that He is able to make all people one nation of believers or disbelievers, as He, may He be Exalted, says: {And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed - all of them entirely} [Yunus 10:99] and {but they will not cease to differ, Except those on whom your Lord has mercy} [Hud 11:118-119]. That is, people will continue to differ in their religions, the creed of their religions, sects, schools of thought and views.

Tafsir Ibn Kathir, 4/361.

Shaykh `Abd ar-Rahman as-Sa`di (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Here Allah, may He be Exalted, tells us that if He had so willed, He could have made all people one nation, following the Islamic religion, for that is not beyond His will and power, for nothing is beyond Him. But His wisdom dictated that they should continue to differ and go against the straight path, following paths that lead to Hell, each one thinking that his way is the true way and that misguidance is what others follow.

{except those on whom your Lord has mercy}, for He guides them to knowledge of the truth and enables them to act upon it and agree upon it. They are the ones who are destined to be blessed, whom divine care and help has reached.

As for the others, they are forsaken and left to their own devices.

{and for that He created them} that is, His wisdom dictated that he should create them so that among them there would be those who are blessed (destined for Paradise) and those who are doomed (destined for Hell), those who will be in agreement and those who will differ, the group whom Allah guided and the group who deserved to be misguided, so as to demonstrate His justice



and wisdom to His slaves, and to make manifest what is hidden in human nature of good and evil, so that there will be circumstances that require jihad, and acts of worship which cannot be perfected and done properly except through tests and trials.

Tafsir as-Sa`di, p. 392.

II.

How can the Muslims be all united on anything except affirmation of Allah's oneness (Tawhid) and creed (`aqidah)? Anyone who examines the condition of the Muslims will find that they are divided into various schools of thought, groups, factions and ideologies, each of which is content with its own way of understanding the texts of the Quran and Sunnah and the way in which they are striving to teach Islam. Hence there are differences, division and fragmentation. If they had all accepted one path, one methodology and one creed, they would have united and become one ummah, but most of them – especially the leaders of the groups and factions – do not regard sound creed as the way to unite the ummah; rather they think that it has caused division among the Muslims, as some of the prominent figures have claimed, but this is a reprehensible view and there can be no unity among the Muslims when there are people like those who hold this view among them.

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) came to people when they were different factions, groups, nations, ideologies and religions, and among them there were black and white, men and women, uneducated and educated, rich and poor, prominent figures and insignificant people. He did not want to unite them on the basis of a language or a land or human thought; rather he united them on the basis of something infallible, which no falsehood can approach it from before it or from behind it; he united them on the basis of the Quran and Tawhid. This is the only way to unite all people despite the differences in their ways of thinking, identities, languages and countries, and they will never find anything better than this cause that could unite them, bring them together and create harmony between them. But when the aim is to bring people together to unite them on the basis of human thought that is subject to refutation, rejection, alteration and omission, this cannot be a means to unite the Muslims. And when the aim is to unite people and



bring them together on the basis of a political issue, this cannot unite the people, because they have different understandings and opinions about this matter. By the same token, a land or country cannot unite the Muslims, because each individual feels attached to the land and country he is in. So the Muslims have no option and no way to come together and unite except on the basis of sound creed, the basis of which is the infallible texts of revelation, for the conditions of the last of this ummah will not be rectified except by means of that by which the condition of the first of it was rectified.

III.

So long as the causes of the Muslims' division are still there, the division will be the inevitable outcome and result thereof. The scholars have mentioned different causes for this division, and Imam ash-Shatibi summed them up as three fundamental causes: ignorance, whims and desires, and blind following of forefathers and elders.

Ash-Shatibi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Any views different from what is described above that took place after that are due to three causes, all or some of which may be present:

1. When an individual thinks – or others think – that he is a knowledgeable man who is qualified to give his views on various matters of religion, when he has attained no such level of knowledge. So he acts as if he is knowledgeable and he regards his view as correct and any differing view as wrong. Sometimes he gives his view on minor issues of religion, and sometimes he gives his view on some fundamental matter of Islam, whether it has to do with creed or fundamentals of worship and jurisprudence. Sometimes he uses some minor issues of Islam to undermine some holistic, fundamental concept, until it is reduced and appears to him as he thinks it should be, without fully understanding its meaning or its objective. This is the innovator, and the authentic hadith referred to such a person when the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “Allah will not take away knowledge by snatching it away from the people; rather He will take away knowledge by taking away the scholars until, when there is no scholar left, people will turn to ignorant leaders



who will be asked questions and will issue fatwas without knowledge. They will go astray and lead others astray.”

2. Another cause of division is following whims and desires. Hence the followers of innovation (bid`ah) are described as followers of whims and desires, because they followed their whims and desires without referring to the shar`i evidence in the manner of one who believes that he must refer to it, and they did not think that they needed to base their views on the shar`i evidence, hence they paid no attention to it. Rather they gave precedence to their whims and desires and relied on their own opinions, then they looked at the shar`i evidence and interpreted it to support their views. Most of these people are people who decide what is right and wrong on the basis of their rational views, and those who are inclined towards philosophy, and others. Similar to them are those who fear people of authority and hope to gain some of what they have; or people who want to be accepted as leaders, so they inevitably go along with people's desires and find loopholes for them to give them the verdict they want, as some scholars narrated the stories of those who keep company with people of authority. So the first group [who rely on their own opinions] rejected many authentic hadiths on the basis of their own reasoning, and they thought ill of some of that which is soundly narrated from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), and they favoured their own views on the basis that they were based on corrupt arguments. They even rejected many issues having to do with the hereafter and its events, such as the sirat, the balance, the resurrection of bodies, and physical bliss and punishment. They also denied that the believers will see the Creator, and so on. In fact, they regard reasoning as a lawgiver and think that laws and legislation can be worked out on the basis of rational thinking, regardless of whether there is a system of Islamic law and Sharia or not; rather if there is a reference in Islamic teachings [to what they worked out on the basis of rational thinking], it is just further support to the conclusion they reached, and they have other reprehensible notions.

3. The third cause of division is insistence on following traditions and customs, even if they are bad or are contrary to the truth. This is following in the footsteps of their forefathers, elders and the like, and it is blameworthy imitation, which Allah condemned in His Book when He said: {In fact they say: We found our forefathers following a certain path, and we are following in their



footsteps} [az-Zukhruf 43:22]; then He said: {[The warner] said: Even if I bring you better guidance than that which you found your forefathers following? They said: Verily, we disbelieve in that with which you have been sent} [az-Zukhruf 43:24]. And Allah says: {[Ibrahim] said: Do they hear you when you call upon them? Or can they benefit you or harm you [in any way]?} [ash-Shu`ara' 26:72-73]. He explained to them that they should follow the clear evidence, but they insisted on merely imitating their forefathers, as they said: {No, but this is what we found our fathers doing} [ash-Shu`ara' 26:74]. This is what is also referred to in the hadith quoted above: "people will turn to ignorant leaders..." All of that refers to following men's views indiscriminately.

End quote from *Al-I`tisam*, 1/421-423.

Based on that, it is impossible for the Muslims to agree and unite on the basis of Tawhid and sound creed. In Islam, you find many symbols of unity and agreement that do not exist in any other religion, such as one qiblah, the Quran, the rituals of Hajj, and so on.

So we hope that the Muslims will unite on one creed and one methodology of understanding the Quran and Sunnah, and whatever could possibly happen after that of different points of view will be something that can be overlooked.

Shaykh Salih ibn Fawzan al-Fawzan (may Allah preserve him) was asked:

What are the issues concerning which it is permissible to differ? And what are those concerning which we should stop having different views? And what must the Muslims do to adhere to their religion?

He replied:

Differences are of two types:

The first type is differences concerning matters of creed. This is not permissible, because what is required of the Muslims is to base our creed on the evidence of the Quran and Sunnah, and not let our reasoning and personal views have any role in that, because creed is to be based solely on the Quran and Sunnah, leaving no room for personal views or differences of opinion.



The second type is matters of jurisprudence that are based on scholarly interpretation of the religious texts. This is something that is unavoidable, because people vary in their ability to understand, but we must follow the view that is supported by the strongest evidence. This is the way to choose when there are different views.

The Muslim must pay attention to his religious affairs, do what Allah has enjoined upon him and refrain from what He has forbidden to him. He should strive to have a good character and attitude towards his brothers, be honest in his dealings with others, fulfil trusts and be a good example to others

The Muslims must discipline themselves to adhere to their religion and to good morals and attitudes, and keep away from vile attitudes and bad friends. They should pay attention to what will benefit them in their worldly and religious affairs, and they should be supporters of Islam and the Muslims.

Al-Muntaqa min Fatawa al-Fawzan, 1/407, 408, question no. 241.

And Allah knows best.