240154 - The order of the two Rightly-Guided Caliphs ‘Uthman and `Ali (may Allah be pleased with them) in terms of virtue and deserving to be appointed caliph

the question

Who is superior: `Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) or `Uthman ibn `Affan (may Allah be pleased with him), noting that there are no hadiths narrated from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) to indicate that `Uthman was superior to `Ali (may Allah be pleased with them both); rather what was narrated speaks of the superiority of Abu Bakr and `Umar (may Allah be pleased with them both).

Is there any hadith to indicate that `Uthman is superior to `Ali (may Allah be pleased with them both), apart from the hadith of `Abdullah ibn `Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), because that is the word of Ibn `Umar and not the word of the best of humanity (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

There is no difference of opinion among Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jama`ah that the best of the ummah after its Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) is Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him), then `Umar (may Allah be pleased with him).

Al-Bukhari (3671) narrated that Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah said: I said to my father – meaning `Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) –: Which of the people is best after the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). He said: Abu Bakr. I said: Then who? He said: Then

`Umar.

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Ahl as-Sunnah are unanimously agreed that the best of them was Abu Bakr, then `Umar.

End quote from *Sharh an-Nawawi `ala Muslim*, 15/148.

See also the answer to question no. 34577.

Secondly:

The early generations and leading scholars differed concerning `Uthman and `Ali: which of them was superior?

The majority are of the view that `Uthman is more virtuous and takes precedence over `Ali, as he superseded him in deserving to be appointed caliph.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Sufyan ath-Thawri and a number of the scholars of Kufah were of the view that `Ali was superior to `Uthman, then Sufyan and others recanted that view.

Some of the scholars of Madinah did not give precedence to either `Uthman or `Ali, and this is one of two reports narrated from Malik, but the other report says that he gave precedence to `Uthman over `Ali, as is the view of all leading scholars such as ash-Shafa`i, Abu Hanifah and his companions, Ahmad ibn Hanbal and his companions, and other leading scholars of Islam.

However the scholars differed with regard to how to judge someone who gave precedence to `Ali over `Uthman and whether he is to be regarded as an innovator. There are two views, both of which were narrated from Ahmad.

Ayyub as-Sakhtiyani, Ahmad ibn Hanbal and ad-Daraqutni said: The one who gives precedence to `Ali over `Uthman has shown disrespect to the Muhajirin and Ansar.

End quote from *Majmu` al-Fatawa*, 4/426.

Those who gave precedence to `Uthman over `Ali (may Allah be pleased with them both) quoted several texts as evidence for that, including the following:

- Al-Bukhari (3697) narrated that Ibn `Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said: At the time of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), we did not regard anyone as equal to Abu Bakr, then `Umar, then `Uthman, then after them we did not differentiate between the Companions of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him.

Abu Dawud (4628) narrated it as follows: We used to say, when the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was alive: The best of the ummah of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) after him is Abu Bakr, then ‘Umar, then ‘Uthman, may Allah be pleased with them all.

Imam Ahmad narrated it in *Al-Fada’il* (857) as follows: We used to say in our conversations at the time of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) that the best of this ummah after its Prophet is Abu Bakr, then `Umar, then `Uthman. News of that reached the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and he did not object to it.

There is a corroborating report with a sound isnad that was narrated by al-Lalka’i in *Sharh Usul I`tiqad Ahl as-Sunnah* (8/1446), which says: At the time of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) we used to say that if Abu Bakr, `Umar and `Uthman were to pass away, all the people would be equal (in virtue). News of that reached the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and he did not object to it.

There is a third corroborating report narrated by at-Tabarani in *Al-Awsat* (8702) which says something similar.

Thus this hadith indicates that `Uthman is given precedence, and it cannot be said in such a case that this is only the view of Ibn `Umar, because the hadith is deemed to be marfu` [attributed to

the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him], because it says: News of that reached the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and he did not object to it..

This comes under the heading of Sunnah that is confirmed by the Prophet's approval, which refers to any word or action of one or more of the Sahabah of which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) became aware but said nothing about it and did not criticize it or object to it, or he agreed with it and expressed his approval of it.

Al-Hafiz Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said: From this hadith we learn that precedence should be given to `Uthman after Abu Bakr and `Umar, as is well known to the majority of Ahl as-Sunnah. However, some of the early generations were of the view that precedence was to be given to `Ali over `Uthman. Among those who held this view was Sufyan ath-Thawri, but it was said that he later recanted that. It was also the view of Ibn Khuzaymah and some others both before and after him. And it was said that neither of them can be given precedence over the other. This was stated by Malik in *Al-Mudawwanah*, and a number of scholars followed him in that, including Yahya al-Qattan, and Ibn Hazm among the later scholars. But the hadith that was narrated concerning this matter is the proof of the majority.

End quote from *Fat-h al-Bari*, 7/16.

- They also quoted as evidence the fact that there was consensus among the Sahabah (may Allah be pleased with them) regarding that matter; the different views that developed after that among some scholars no longer exist, and the consensus of Ahl as-Sunnah settled on giving precedence to `Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him).

Al-Bukhari (7207) narrated that when `Abd ar-Rahman ibn `Awf (may Allah be pleased with him) consulted the people regarding `Uthman and `Ali after the murder of `Umar (may Allah be pleased with him), he addressed the people and said: To proceed: O `Ali, I have consulted the people, and I do not think that they regard anyone as equal to `Uthman, so do not incur blame (by disagreeing). Then he said (to `Uthman): I swear allegiance to you on condition that you will adhere to the path of Allah and His Messenger and the two caliphs who succeeded him. Thus `Abd

ar-Rahman swore allegiance to him, and the people – the Muhajirun and Ansar, the commanders of the army and all the Muslims – also swore allegiance to him.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

`Abd ar-Rahman spent three days and nights consulting the Muhajirun and Ansar, and those who followed them in guidance. He consulted the Mothers of the Believers and he consulted the governors of the regions, until `Abd ar-Rahman said: I have spent three days and nights without sleeping. On the third day, he said to `Uthman: Do you give a covenant and promise to Allah that if I appoint you, you will definitely rule with justice, and if I appoint `Ali, you will definitely hear and obey? He said: Yes.

He said to `Ali: Do you give a covenant and promise to Allah that if I appoint you, you will definitely rule with justice, and if I appoint `Uthman, you will definitely hear and obey? He said: Yes. [`Abd ar-Rahman] said: I realized that the people will not regard anyone as good as `Uthman.

Then `Ali and `Abd ar-Rahman, and all the Muslims, swore allegiance to `Uthman, willingly and by choice, without any promises of anything in return, and with no threat that he scared them with.

This was their consensus on giving precedence to `Uthman over `Ali.

End quote from *Al-Fatawa al-Kubra*, 4/445.

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

In the end, there was consensus among Ahl as-Sunnah that their order in terms of virtue is the same as their order in terms of being appointed as caliph, may Allah be pleased with all of them.

End quote from *Fat-h al-Bari*, 7/34.

He also said:

Al-Bayhaqi narrated in *Al-I`tiqad* from ash-Shafa`i that he said: The Sahabah and their followers were unanimously agreed on the superiority of Abu Bakr, then `Umar, then `Uthman, then `Ali.

End quote from *Fat-h al-Bari*, 7/71.

Ad-Daraqutni (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

`Uthman ibn `Affan is more virtuous than `Ali ibn Abi Talib according to the consensus of the Companions of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). This is the view of Ahl as-Sunnah.

End quote from *Su'alat as-Silmi li'd-Daraqutni*, p. 238.

Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The view of Ahl as-Sunnah settled on giving precedence to `Uthman, then `Ali.

End quote from *Al-`Aqidah al-Wasitiyyah*, p. 117.

But this issue is one of the issues concerning which there are different scholarly opinions, and the one who held a different view is not to be regarded as an innovator unless his belief that `Ali was superior lead him to object to `Uthman (may Allah be pleased with him) being appointed as caliph.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah said:

This issue – the issue of `Uthman and `Ali – is not one of the fundamental issues because of which the one who holds a different view is to be regarded as misguided according to the majority of scholars. Rather the issue because of which the one who holds a different view is to be regarded as misguided is the issue of caliphate.

End quote from *Al-`Aqidah al-Wasitah*, p. 118.

Adh-Dhahabi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Believing that `Ali was superior to `Uthman is not to be regarded as a Rafidi idea or an innovation (bid`ah); rather it is a view that was held by some of the Sahabah and Tabi`in. Both `Uthman and `Ali were men of virtue, among the first to come to Islam and among those who strove in jihad.

They are close in terms of knowledge and status, and perhaps they will be at the same level in the hereafter, for they are both among the foremost of the martyrs – may Allah be pleased with them both – but the majority of the ummah are of the view that `Uthman is to be given precedence over `Ali, and this is our view. However, the matter is not that serious, and undoubtedly `Abu Bakr and `Umar were superior to both of them, and whoever has a different view regarding that is a exteme Shi`i.

End quote from *Siyar A`lam an-Nubala'*, 12/419.

And Allah knows best.