90112 - Which Group Is the Saved One?

the question

Please clarify how to differentiate between the groups that claim they are following the right path. We know that Ahlul Sunnah wal jama’ah is the group that follows the straight path. But there are many Muslims do not know the ruling on the other groups, which started to be widely spread these days as the prophet (PBUH) said. As he said what means that there will be many groups 73 sects, Allah knows best how many, and that only one is following the straight path.

How can we differentiate between all these groups? How to refute them? Shall we avoid them and their behaviours?

I wish you provide evidences from Quran and Hadith for the great importance of the matter, as the majority do not know, and we fear for the new converts to get lost amongst all these groups.

I found a related question on the site but I need more clarification.

Summary of answer

The saved group in Islam refers to Ahl As-Sunnah wal-Jama`ah, those who adhere strictly to the Quran, Sunnah, and the consensus of scholars. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) described them as following his path and that of his Companions.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The Reality of Division in the Muslim Ummah

Division and differences among this Ummah is something inevitable, to which history bears witness, as do the texts of the Sunnah of our Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be

upon him).

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Whoever among you lives after I am gone will see a great deal of dissent.” (Narrated by Abu Dawud, 4067); classed as authentic by Al-Albani in Sahih Abu Dawud)

Dissent has occurred in the political field, as well as in the fields of thought and `Aqidah, which is represented in the appearance of different sects at the end of the era of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, such as the Murji’is, Shi`ah and Khawarij.

But by His mercy, Allah decreed that this division should happen when some groups drifted away from the way of the main body of the Muslims and developed their own different approach, and they were distinguished by their own names and character.

So the `Aqidah of Ahl As-Sunnah wal-Jama`ah , and the `Aqidah of the majority of Muslims, was not confused even for a day with that of the other, misguided sects, so that those sects would not dare to call themselves Ahl As-Sunnah wal-Jama`ah , rather they are called after the Bid`ah (innovation) that they introduced, or the person who founded the sect. You can see that when you examine the names of all the sects.

Hadith on the Seventy-Three Sects: A Clear Prophecy

The famous Hadith about the Ummah splitting into seventy-three sects bears witness to that.

It was narrated from Mu`awiyah ibn Abu Sufyan (may Allah be pleased with him) that he said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stood among us and said: “Those who came before you of the people of the Book split into seventy-two sects, and this Ummah will split into seventy-three: seventy-two in Hell and one in Paradise, and that is the Jama`ah (main body of Muslims).”

The Hadith was narrated by Abu Dawud, 4597; and others; classed as authentic by Al-Hakim (1/128), who said: it is an important Hadith that represents a basic principle. It was classed as

sound by Ibn Hajar in Takhrij Al-Kashshaf (63).

It was also classed as authentic by Ibn Taymiyah in Majmu` Al-Fatawa (3/345), Ash-Shatibi in Al-I`tisam (1/430), and Al-`Iraqi in Takhrij Al-Ihya' (9/133). It is mentioned frequently and often quoted as evidence by the scholars in the books of Sunnah, and it was narrated from a number of the Companions via many chains of narration, most of the soundest of which specify the number of sects as being seventy-three.

Characteristics of the Saved Group in Islam

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) described the saved group as the Jama`ah , i.e., the consensus of the Muslim scholars. In other reports, he also described them as "the vast multitude", as in the Hadith of Abu Umamah and others which is recorded by Ibn Abu `Asim in As-Sunnah (1/34) and At-Tabarani in Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir (8/321), with a chain of narration that is authentic because of corroborating evidence.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also described them in the following terms: "My Ummah will split into seventy-three sects, all of whom will be in Hell except one group." They said: Who are they, O Messenger of Allah? He said: "(Those who follow) that which I and my companions follow." This is mentioned in the Hadith of `Abdullah ibn `Amr which was recorded and classed as sound by At-Tirmidhi (2641). It was also classed as sound by Al-`Iraqi in Ahkam Al-Quran (3/432), Al-`Iraqi in Takhrij Al-Ihya' (3/284) and Al-Albani in Sahih At-Tirmidhi.

This is the clearest sign that the Muslim can use to determine what is the saved group , so he should follow the way of the majority of scholars, those whom all the people testify are trustworthy and religiously-committed, and he should follow the way of the earlier scholars among the Companions, the Successors of the Companions (Tabi`un) and the four Imams and other scholars, and he should beware of every sect that differs from the main body of Muslims (Jama`ah) by following innovation (Bid`ah).

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

The sign of the people of Bid`ah is that they do not follow the Salaf. (End quote from Majmu`Al-Fatawa, 4/155).

He also said (3/346): The sign of these groups – i.e., the seventy-two groups that go against Ahl As-Sunnah wal-Jama`ah – is that they forsake the Quran, Sunnah and scholarly consensus. The one who follows the Quran, Sunnah and scholarly consensus is one of Ahl As-Sunnah wal-Jama`ah. End quote.

It is not permissible for anyone to imagine after this that the Shi`ah, for example, are the saved group, or that the deviant Sufis, Khawarij or Habashis are the saved group. Rather these are innovated groups which only follow invented ideas, that are denounced by the scholars and the majority of Muslims, who feel repulsion in their hearts towards them. Their ideas were never believed in for a day by Abu Bakr, `Umar, `Uthman or `Ali (may Allah be pleased with them), or by Imam Abu Hanifah, Malik, Ash-Shafi`i or Ahmad ibn Hanbal. Would any wise person think that a belief that these imams were unaware of could be correct?

Think about it. There is the greatest and most obvious difference between Ahl As-Sunnah wal-Jama`ah (the saved group) and other misguided groups.

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

Hence the saved group is described as Ahl As-Sunnah wal-Jama`ah, and they are the greater majority and the vast multitude. As for the other groups, they are followers of weird ideas, division, innovation and whims and desires, and none of these groups reached anywhere close to the size of the saved group, let alone being equal to them, rather some of these groups are very small in number. The sign of these groups is that they go against the Quran, Sunnah and scholarly consensus. The one who follows the Quran, Sunnah and scholarly consensus is one of Ahl As-Sunnah wal-Jama`ah. (End quote from Majmu` Al-Fatawa, 3/346)

Ash-Shatibi has mentioned many names of the doomed groups in Al-I`tisam, (1/453-460).

The Difference between Doomed and Disbelieving Sects

The scholars of Ahl As-Sunnah wal-Jama`ah have stated in their books that the other sects are among the misguided and doomed innovated groups, and that they deserve to enter Hell because of the reprehensible ideas and grave innovations that they have introduced into the religion of Allah. But in most cases they are not regarded as disbelievers, rather they are regarded as Muslim sects.

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

Similarly, with the other seventy-two groups, those that are hypocrites are inwardly disbelievers, and those that are not hypocrites but rather believe inwardly in Allah and His Messenger are not inwardly disbelievers, even though they are mistaken in their interpretations, regardless of what that mistake may be. Some of them may have some of the branches of hypocrisy, or they may not have the kind of hypocrisy that dooms a man to the lowest depths of Hell.

The one who says that each of the seventy-two sects is guilty of disbelief that puts one beyond the pale of Islam is going against the Quran and Sunnah and the consensus of the Companions (may Allah be pleased with them all), and the consensus of the four Imams and others. None of them regarded any of the seventy-two sects as disbelievers; rather they regard one another as disbelievers. (End quote from Majmu` Al-Fatawa, 7/218)

This does not mean that every sect that calls itself Muslim is actually Muslim, rather they may be disbelievers and apostates, such as the extreme Rafidis, the extreme Sufis and the Batini sects such as the Druze, Nusayris and others. These are all beyond the pale of Islam and are not regarded as being among the sects mentioned in the Hadith.

The Root Causes of Sectarian Division in Islam

The cause of difference and division among these groups mentioned in the Hadith has to do with fundamental matters of religion and basic issues of `Aqidah, not differences of opinion regarding

Fiqh.

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

These are regarded as sects because they differ from the saved group with regard to some fundamental issues of religion and basic rules of Shari`ah, not with regard to minor issues, because differences with regard to minor issues does not lead to division and factionalism, rather factionalism occurs when there are differences concerning fundamental issues of Islam. (End quote from Al-I`tisam, 1/439)

If some Muslim groups stand out from others because of a specific method of Dawah and working for Islam, but they do not go against Ahl As-Sunnah wal-Jama`ah in their `Aqidah, then they are not to be regarded as doomed groups, rather they are among the saved group in sha Allah, if they follow the way of the Companions and Successors in `Aqidah and action.

And Allah knows best.