

# Every Innovation is a Misguidance : Shaykh al-Albanee

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One thing the Muslim scholars do not differ about at all is the fact that Islaam is established upon two magnificent and great fundamental principles. Indeed they are

- 1) worshipping only Allaah apart from others and
- 2) following and taking our example from only the Prophet (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) apart from others.

However, what I want to discuss here only concerns the principle that states: A Muslim's Eemaan does not become complete until he believes that Muhammad (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) is the Messenger of Allaah. And that if any person on the face of this earth were to bear witness to Allaah's Oneness according to the three categories (of Tawheed), then he will not be a believer until he adds to that his belief that Muhammad (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) is His slave and messenger. So if it is this way, then it is required for every Muslim to learn the meaning of this beautiful statement (of Tawheed): **“So know that Laa Ilaaha Illaa Allaah (there is no deity worthy of worship except Allaah)” [Surah Muhammad: 19]** and to acknowledge the true sense of its meaning in two parts. First, to believe in it and second, to put it into actuality in himself, his worship and his belief in Allaah.

Likewise, it is an obligation upon every Muslim to know the meaning of “And I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and messenger.” This testimony (of bearing witness that Muhammad (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) is Allaah's slave and messenger) completes the first testimony (of bearing witness that there is no deity that has the right to be worshipped except Allaah). So due to this, the testimony (of Faith) does not become complete unless the Muslim believes in this (second) testimony – understanding, believing and accepting it firstly, and then applying it in the affairs of his life secondly. So our saying: “And I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and messenger” requires, among other things, that we believe that Muhammad (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) conveyed the message and that he carried out his task in its complete and perfect form, such that no one that comes after him, however high or elevated he may be, can correct or amend some part of it. Our Lord, may He be Glorified and Exalted, indicated this fact in his saying: **“This day I have completed your Religion for you, and I have perfected My favor upon you, and I am pleased with Islaam as a Religion for you.” [Surat-ul-Maa'idah: 3]**

This is why it is authentically reported on the Prophet (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) from numerous paths of narration that he said: **“I have not left anything that will bring you closer to Allaah and distance you from the Hellfire, except that I have commanded you with it. And I have not left anything that will bring you closer to the Hellfire and distance you from Allaah except that I have forbade you from it.”** So there has not been left any room for amending anything from it, whether it be a simple or a trivial thing being amended.

This is why it is reported on the Imaam of Daar-ul-Hijrah (Madeenah), Imaam Maalik Ibn Anas, may Allaah have mercy on him, that he said: “Whosoever introduces into Islaam an innovation, which he deems is good, then he has claimed that Muhammad (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) has betrayed (the trust of conveying) the Message. Read the saying of Allaah, the Mighty and Majestic: ‘This day I have completed your Religion for you, and I have perfected My favor upon you, and I am pleased with Islaam as a Religion for you.’ [Surat-ul-Maa'idah:3] So whatever was not (part of) the Religion on that day, is not (part of) the Religion on this day. And the last part of this ummah (nation) will not be rectified, except by that which rectified its first part.”

This was from the understanding of Imaam Maalik, the Imaam of Daar-ul-Hijrah, such that he plainly stated in a clear Arabic language that whoever introduces into Islaam just one innovation and then claims that it is something good, he has in fact claimed that Muhammad (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) betrayed the Message. And whoever makes this claim, he does not believe (truly) that “Muhammad is His slave and messenger.” As is very clear in the words of this noble Imaam, it (the innovation) is “not (part of) the Religion on this day.”

So it is upon the Muslim to implement his Ittibaa' (following of the Prophet), such that he could be truthful in (his declaration that) Muhammad, Allaah's Messenger, is His slave and messenger. And that he (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) brought the complete and pure message, without adding to it or subtracting from it. If this is the case, then every Muslim must acknowledge his extent and stop at the points where his Prophet (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) has placed limits for him, such as the acts of worship and deeds of obedience (to Allaah). This is because the pen has dried with what was revealed previously (i.e. no more revelation after Muhammad (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam)). And there was no room left open to approve of an act of worship that didn't exist previously in the first days (i.e. of the Prophet). Consequently, our pious predecessors (Salaf As-Saalih) have come and gone all acknowledging the extent of the Prophet (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) in that he first fulfilled his mission and conveyed the

Message, as you know. And (second) that he was the best worshipper amongst Allaah's worshippers and the most fearing of Allaah. So there is no room to correct him:

1. From the standpoint of legislating (revealed matters) into the Religion, as you have heard the ayah and Imaam Maa'ik's comments about it.
2. Such that it can be claimed that there is someone who is a better worshipper and more worshipping (of Allaah) than Allaah's Messenger (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam). This is impossible.

So whoever understands these two facts, which are related to one's belief that Muhammad (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) is Allaah's slave and messenger, he will limit the worship he performs for Allaah to only that which has been reported on the Prophet (in the ahaadeeth). And he will not put any example or role model before him other than the Prophet (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam). Nor will he ever claim this second point, meaning it is impossible that it can get into the mind of any believer that he is more dutiful to Allaah or more fearing of Allaah or more worshipping of Allaah than him (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam). This is something impossible.

We will mention what has been reported in the two Saheeh collections on the authority of Anas Ibn Maalik (raa) that a group of people went to see the Prophet (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) but asked his wives because they were not able to find him. So they asked his wives about the Prophet's worship – about his standing in prayer at night, his fasting during the day and about his relations with his wives. So they mentioned to them what they knew about his guidance regarding that – and his guidance is the best guidance on the face of this earth as is stated in the khutbah al-Haajah: **“And the best guidance is the guidance of Muhammad.”** The wives of the Prophet mentioned to these men that he (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) would fast and break his fast, and that he would pray at night and also sleep and that he would marry women.

Anas (raa) said: “When they heard that from the wives of the Prophet, they found his (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) worship to be little.” They thought it to be little because of what had settled in their minds that the Prophet must pray the whole night and that he must fast all the time and that he was a monk and did not go near his wives. So they were shocked to find something that was not in compliance with their notions. So they assumed that the reason for this was because Allaah had forgiven all of the Prophet's past and future sins. So it is as if they said: “The Prophet (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) only minimized in his worship – which they thought to be little – because Allaah had forgiven his sins.

So there wasn't left any obstacle preventing him from increasing in the worship of his Lord.” This was a mistake on their part without a doubt. This is since they didn't know that this worship which they thought to be little, was in fact worship that could not be fulfilled by even the best worshipper amongst mankind, not even Dawood (as) about whom it is authentically reported in Saheeh Al-Bukhaaree that the Prophet (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) said: **“Dawood was the best worshipper amongst mankind.”** This group of people did not know that the Prophet was the best worshipper amongst mankind with this worship (of his) and that not even the best worshipper amongst mankind was able to perform his worship, as I have mentioned.

And that was from the things that he (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) was asked about when some people – who were well aware of his habits not like that group of people that was ignorant of his habits – found him, and they felt compassion for him (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam), because they saw him standing in prayer until his feet had become swollen. So they said to him: “O Messenger of Allaah! Allaah has forgiven your past and future sins.” They meant by this: “Have pity on yourself, O Messenger of Allaah! Be easy in the worship, for your feet have become swollen.” And his response was: **“Should I not then be a grateful servant?”**

This is a refutation of the false reasoning employed by that small band of people, who said the reason for the Prophet's little worship was because Allaah had forgiven his past and future sins. They were not aware that the Prophet (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) would stand in night prayer until his feet would become swollen. So when it was said to him: “O Messenger of Allaah! Allaah has forgiven your past and future sins”, he responded: “Should I not then be a grateful servant?”

Basing on what they imagined was little worship on the part of the Prophet and what they knew of Allaah having forgiven his past and future sins, each person in this small group assumed that they were obligated to exceed in worship and that they must surpass what they heard about the Prophet's worship with regard to his fasting, praying at night and relations with women. So they made the following pledges to themselves: The first person said “I will pray all night and won't sleep.” The second one said: “As for me, I will fast all the time and never go a day without fasting.” And the third person said: “I will not marry women.”

Why? Because they assumed that marriage was a distraction and turned one away from perfecting one's worship to Allaah. But they did not know – and Allaah knows best but it seem to me that they were new (reverts) to Islaam who did not learn yet of the Commands and Rulings of Islaam – that marriage was itself worship, as is found in the famous hadeeth, when a group of poor people came to the Prophet (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) and said:

"The people with much wealth and income have surpassed us – they pray like we pray, they fast like we fast, and they make Hajj like we make Hajj. And they give money in charity but we don't give away anything in charity!" So the Prophet (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) said to them: "Shall I not direct you to something, which if you do, you will surpass those in front of you and those behind you will never be able catch up to you (in reward), except for those who do the same as you?" So the representative of the poor people went back to his companions among the poor folk and related to them the good news that came from the Prophet. So they became very happy at hearing it. However, it was not long before their representative went to Allaah's Messenger again to tell him: "O Messenger of Allaah! What you told us was conveyed to the rich folk and so they have begun to do what we are doing." So Allaah's Messenger (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) said: "That is the bounty of Allaah, which He gives to whom He pleases."

This is the narration of Imaam Muslim found in his Saheeh. In another narration of the hadeeth, it is reported that the Prophet (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) said to them: "Verily in every tasbeehah (saying SubhanAllaah) there is charity for you. And in every tahmeedah (saying Al-Hamdulillaah) there is charity. And in every takbeerah (saying Allaahu Akbar) there is charity. And in every tahleelah (saying Bismillaah) there is charity. Commanding good is charity and forbidding evil is charity. And removing a harmful obstacle from the road is charity." Then the Prophet (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) continued to mention many noble characteristics. Then he said at the end of the hadeeth: "**And in your having relations with your wife, there is charity.**" They said in amazement: "O Messenger of Allaah, will one of us fulfill his desire (with his wife) and get rewarded for that?" So the Prophet (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) said: "Don't you see that if one fulfills it in a forbidden way, that he will have a burden (of sin) for it?" They said: "Of course, O Messenger of Allaah." So he said: "**Then likewise, if he fulfills it in a lawful way he will be rewarded for it.**"

So they were not aware of the likes of this hadeeth and other hadeeths in which there is found an incitement to get married and especially in producing children and progeny, as is reported in the authentic hadeeth: "Marry the fertile and loving woman, for indeed I will compete with other nations by you, as regards to who has the most followers, on the Day of Judgement." So the one who marries and keeps himself chaste and keeps his wife chaste, he will be rewarded for that. This group was ignorant about this, so there was one among them who made a pledge binding on himself that he would not marry, saying: "As for me, I will not marry women." Then that group left and when the Prophet (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) returned home, his wives informed him of what they heard from that group of people and the pledges they made to themselves. So the Prophet (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) gave a khutbah about this in his masjid, saying: "What's wrong with these people who say such and such" (?) – repeating to the audience what these individuals who came to his house had said. "This last person will not marry women. The second said he would fast everyday and not go a day without fasting. And the other one said that he will pray all night and not sleep."

However it was from the Prophet's etiquettes when admonishing, reprimanding and teaching the people that he would hide the faults of those who committed errors or sinned (by not mentioning their names). So he would not expose them but rather make such statements like the one you just read above: "What's wrong with these people who say such and such?" This is because there is no benefit in mentioning the (name of the) person who erred, unless his error involves a large group of people and he is present (for the reminder). But if the people leave and he leaves, the opportunity for reminding them goes away. So in this situation, one must mention that to the people publicly. And it is not like that which is thought by some people who know about wisdom and gentleness when commanding good and forbidding evil, for they do not realize that gentleness does not nullify manifesting the criticism of one who errs if his error involves a group of people. The stories of our Salaf (predecessors), all praise be to Allaah, are filled with reports bearing witness to this fact. It is sufficient for me to just mention what the two Shaikhs (Al-Bukhaaree and Muslim) reported in their Saheehs from the hadeeth of 'Abdullaah Ibn 'Umar who said:

"Umar Ibn Al-Khattaab, rady Allaahu 'anhu, was giving the Friday khutbah – naturally in the Prophet's masjid – when a man from the Companions of Allaah's Messenger entered – and in one narration it states that it was 'Uthmaan Ibn 'Affaan. So 'Umar stopped his khutbah and turned towards this person that had come late and had missed coming early to hear the dhikr and to hear the Jumu'ah khutbah. So the man responded, saying: 'O Commander of the Believers, I did not do anything except hear the Adhaan, make wudoo and then come to the masjid.' So he said to him reprimanding him in a disapproving interrogating manner: 'The wudoo also, for I heard Allaah's Messenger (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) say: Whoever goes to (pray) Jumu'ah, then he should take ghusl (bath).'"

The point we derive from this report is that he (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) reprimanded 'Uthmaan Ibn 'Affaan publicly in front of a large gathering of witnesses because he came late to the Jumu'ah khutbah and prayer. So therefore: The principle of teaching and reminding someone is based on the foundation of: Hiding the faults of people, unless there is a benefit that requires that it be done in public. This is the principle that the Messenger of Allaah implemented when he gave the khutbah regarding that group of people that had come to his house. So he said: "What is wrong with these people who say such and such" making an indication of them but not naming anyone of them.

The point is that the Prophet (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) said: "As for me...", which is a refutation of the essence of what was stated by those people who claimed the reason that the Prophet, had little worship was due to Allaah having forgiven his past and future sins. So he said: "As for me, then I am the most fearing amongst you of Allaah, and the most dutiful amongst you towards Allaah. As for me, then indeed I fast and I don't fast" – meaning I don't fast all the time. "And I pray at night and I also sleep" – meaning I do not stay up the whole night, as is done by those extremists amongst worshippers who increase and try to surpass the worship of Allaah's Messenger (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam). This is why 'Aa'ishah said, as is recorded in Saheeh Muslim: "The Prophet (Sallallaahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) never stayed up a whole night in worship."

So the Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) said, reminding us that the Religion is moderation and that worship is moderation – neither exaggeration nor negligence: “As for me, then I am the most fearing amongst you of Allaah, and the most dutiful amongst you towards Allaah. As for me, then indeed I fast and I don't fast. And I pray at night and I also sleep. And I marry women. So whoever turns away from my Sunnah then he is not from me.”

So the Prophet's Sunnah, as it came to us from Islaam, is that which all the Muslims are obligated to adhere to. And I guarantee that if Dawood, who was the best worshipper amongst mankind according to the testimony of Allaah's Messenger, came after the Prophet's being sent with this complete and perfect Islaam, he would not be able to encompass doing all of the Prophet's acts of worship. This means all of the acts of worship that Allaah's Messenger brought whether through speech, actions or silent approval. Due to this, there remain no grounds for any Muslim to add an act of worship after Allaah completed His Religion by sending His Prophet with this perfect Islaam.

So after realizing that the Prophet is the best worshipper amongst mankind and the most dutiful and fearing of Allaah amongst them, there should not be anything but following of Allaah's Messenger (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa Sallam). We are upon certainty that we will never be able to encompass the worship of Allaah's Messenger, except for occasionally or at brief periods of time. So we are completely incapable of following and tracing the footsteps of Allaah's Messenger in his worship. This is impossible – with respect to every individual amongst mankind after the Prophet.

Therefore, there remains nothing before us except that we all strive for two things:

1. To learn the Sunnah of Allaah's Messenger in all matters that came to us from Islaam – whether in Creed or in Worship or in characteristics and manners. And as I said before, we will never be able to do more than just imitate him, as it is said:

“So imitate (them) if you are not like them, Verily, imitating the righteous ones is success.”

It is not for us to imitate anyone amongst mankind except him, because he is the most perfect of humans according to unanimous agreement. And everyone that imitates him after he has gone will be overwhelmed by his ocean of worship.

2. This is the first thing – that we must know the Sunnah of Allaah's Messenger according to the wide and extensive meaning. This is since the Prophet's saying concerning that group of people: “So whoever turns away from my Sunnah, then he is not from me”, this sentence in this general hadeeth does not refer to the abandonment of the recommended sunnah acts, for example, that this person is not from the Prophet. This is not what is meant by the hadeeth. Rather, the meaning of the hadeeth is: “Whoever turns away from my Sunnah” meaning from my Way and from my Methodology in all affairs of my religious life. This is the kind of person that is not from him. And this kind of person varies with regard to his remoteness from following the Prophet.

So the Sunnah has two meanings:

1. A religious Arabic language-based one, and it is that which the Messenger of Allaah (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) and those who followed his way were upon.

2. That which has occurred in the custom of the Fuqahaa in dividing the worship into two types – Fard (Obligation) and Sunnah (Recommended). The Sunnah here according to their definition of it is: “That which the one who does it will be rewarded for and which the one who abandons it will not be punished for.”

As for the person that abandons the Messenger's Sunnah, with its first meaning – i.e. his way and methodology – then this person is in misguidance. And his deviance can either be large or little depending on his closeness or remoteness to following Allaah's Messenger (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa Sallam). So based on this, we should find ourselves as having no need for amending and introducing a “good innovation” (bid'ah hasanah) into Islaam, claiming that there is nothing wrong with this innovation. This is because we should find ourselves as falling short and being incapable of following the noble Prophet (Sallallahu 'alaihi wa Sallam) in everything that has been reported to us concerning his worship, whether it is related to supplications, remembrances or prayers. So it is sufficient for us to just follow him, according to our abilities. Here, I would like to mention a story reported by Al-Bukhaaree in his Saheeh so that you can realize the worth of Allaah's saying: “This day I have completed your Religion for you, and I have perfected My favor upon you, and I am pleased with Islaam as a Religion for you.” [Surat-ul-Maa'idah: 3]

Al-Bukhaaree reported that one of the Jewish Rabbis went to 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattaab during the time of his Khilaafah and said to him: “O Commander of the Believers! There is an ayah in the Book of Allaah that if it had been revealed unto us – a gathering of Jews – we would have taken the day it was revealed as a day of 'Eid (holiday).” So he asked: “Which ayah is it?” So the Rabbi mentioned

the ayah: "This day I have completed your Religion for you..." So 'Umar said: "This ayah was indeed revealed on a day of 'Eid, on the day of Jumu'ah while the Allaah's Messenger was in 'Arafaat (meaning in his farewell pilgrimage). So this ayah was indeed sent down on a very great day in which there is a combination of two virtues and two 'Eids – the 'Eid of Jumu'ah and the 'Eid of 'Arafaat."

Why did this Jew say: "Had it been revealed unto us, we would have taken the day it was revealed as a day of 'Eid?" It is because he was aware of the greatness of this blessing, which Allaah bestowed upon His servants. But what about us Muslims today? Unfortunately, we do not give this great blessing its due weight in worth. This is why you find many people in the past – in previous generations – who have filled the Muslims with prayers, words of remembrance and supplications that the Prophet did not come with. What has come to us from the Prophet is truly sufficient and adequate, in fact it is more than our human capabilities can grasp. However, each one of us takes from this worship what he is able to and what conforms to his capability and capacity.