
Difference between following and innovation

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allaah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy

Question: What is the difference between Ittiba" (following one's traditions; imitation) and Al Ibtidah (innovation)?

Shaykh Abdul-Azeez ibn Baaz (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ):¹ Ittiba' is what we are required to do according to the Sharee'ah (Islamic law), i.e. following what the Prophet (peace be upon him) has brought of orders and prohibitions. It is said "We should follow" because Allaah says:

Follow what has been sent down unto you from your Lord (the Qur'aan and Prophet Muhammad's Sunnah), **and follow not any Auleeyaa'** (protectors and helpers who order you to associate partners in worship with Allaah), **besides Him** (Allaah)

and:

Say (O Muhammad sallallaahu alaihi wasallam): **"O mankind! Verily, I am sent to you all as the Messenger of Allaah – to Whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. Laa ilaaha illa Huwa** (none has the right to be worshipped but He). **It is He Who gives life and causes death. So believe in Allaah and His Messenger** (Muhammad sallallaahu alaihi wasallam), **the Prophet who can neither read nor write** (i.e. Muhammad sallallaahu alaihi wasallam), **who believes in Allaah and His Words** [(this Qur'aan), **the Tawrat** (Torah) **and the Injeel** (Gospel) **and also Allaah's Word: "Be!" – and he was, i.e. 'Isa (Jesus) son of Maryam (Mary), and follow him so that you may be guided."**

We are ordered to follow the Prophet (peace be upon him) and the Qur'aan. Holding on to what has been revealed by Allaah in the Qur'aan and what the Prophet (peace be upon him) has said or done is Ittiba. It is to follow the example of the Prophet (peace be upon him) in what he ordered or prohibited. This is Ittiba, which is Waajib (obligatory) in matters which we are obliged to do, and it is Mustahab (desirable) in matters which we are desired to do.

As for Ibtida', it is innovation of something in the religion which Allaah has not permitted, for example: worship in a way that Allaah has not made lawful. This is called Ibtida'.

¹ (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) (rahimahullaah) May Allaah have mercy on him

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The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: (“**Anyone who introduces anything into this matter of ours (Islam) that is not part of it will have it rejected.**”) and he also said: (**The most evil of matters are those which are newly introduced in religion**), and **every Bid’ah is a Dalalah** (deviation from what is right).

So if a person was to perform more than five Prayers and said they would perform six Prayers, increasing one Prayer at any time of the day, is a Batil (null/void) and Bid’ah. It is prohibited to perform or to invite people to perform it with the intention that it is a Fard (obligatory, based on a definitive text). Or if someone said the two Sajdahs (prostrations) are not enough, let's make a third Sajdah in every Rak’ah (unit of Salaah); this is Bid’ah, which if purposely done, will make the Prayer Batil. Likewise if a person decides to perform a second Rukoo’ (bowing) in Prayer, this is Bid’ah except for the eclipse Prayer. Also if someone says: let's allocate a night for worship and we shall pray ten or twenty Rak'ahs on the Thursday or Friday night every week, this is Bid’ah for it is not something which Allaah prescribed, as is the night of the Prophet’s (peace be upon him) birthday, or the night of the birth of Fatimah, Al-Husayn, Al Badawy, Aboo Bakr Al-Siddeeq, or ‘Umar, it is Bid’ah and the celebration where they pray, talk, perform Dhikr; this is all Bid’ah because neither Allaah nor the Prophet made it lawful.

Therefore Ibtida’ is to innovate a worship which Allaah did not prescribe, whether it is a verbal or practical; all this is Bid’ah. Allaah (Glorified and Exalted be He) has not prescribed it.

Of such Bid’ah is the construction domes and Masjids (mosques) over the graves. People think that this is a way to get closer to Allaah, and it is from the Deen (religion). Rather it is Bid’ah because the Prophet (peace be upon him) forbade construction over graves, because this could lead to Shirk (associating others with Allaah in His Divinity or worship). Of such Shirk acts are to touch the graves with the intention of getting closer to Allaah. This is Bid’ah and the Prophet (peace be upon him) forbade building over the graves or plastering them, because this could lead to Shirk. This is also true for those who invoke the dead say “I invoke You (Allaah) by (the intercession of) the dead of the graves”, “I invoke You (Allaah) with the honour or sake of the Prophet”, or “with the honour or sake of the righteous people”; all this is Bid’ah. But if someone says: I invoke You (Allaah) with my love for You, or with my belief in Your Messenger or with Your Noble Names; this is acceptable and lawful.

Bid’ah is what people have innovated in the religion and not sanctioned by Allaah and His Prophet. Ittiba’ is to follow the approach prescribed by Allaah to His servants, and follow in the footsteps of the Prophet (peace be upon him).

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