

And forget not grace towards one another

Allah (swt) says, 'And forget not grace towards one another; verily, Allah sees all that you do.' [Al-Baqarah: 237]

Difference of opinion and varying perspectives in discretionary matters is essentially positive and a sign of maturity of thought and cultural diversity, as long as these differences are based on inference from solid evidence, weighing benefits against harm and prioritizing legitimate interests; and as long as this is done by those who possess the ability to do so, i.e. people possessing knowledge, sound opinion, insight and research. Ibn al Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) says, 'If there is no evidence from the Sunnah or the consensus of scholars and there is room for deriving a rule of Divine Law by independent interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah, the one who exercises his discretion or follows the opinion of such a scholar is not to be blamed.'

We must therefore learn to excuse one another, especially if the ijthad or opinion has been issued by leading scholars whose virtue and sacrifices for the sake of Dawah and Jihad are well known. If their opinion is not in concurrence with the correct position in a particular issue, it's not because they intentionally adopted the incorrect opinion; rather their picture of the situation might have been incomplete, leading them to an incorrect conclusion. It is their right that we advise them in the best possible manner, choosing the most appropriate and gentle words. It is important for us to interpret their opinion in a positive light and to stay clear of the methodology of whimsically judging others as 'innovators, sinful, and ignorant'. Such accusations are highly inappropriate when guiding ordinary people, let alone adopting this disgraceful approach with people who have spent their lives defending the Religion, who have faced what they faced in prison cells, and whose stances to this day are a witness to their virtue and integrity.

It is the considered opinion of the scholars that differences of opinion are acceptable and must not give way to disputation, antagonism or slander, as long as these differences remain within the parameters of the Shariah. The righteous predecessors differed with one another, while conforming to the manners and principles of differing in opinion. As for those who violated or ignored these principles, they were not blessed in their knowledge, and people were generally ungenerous in praising them because of their severity vis à vis their opponents.

Ibn al Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) says, 'Difference of opinion among people is inevitable because of the differences in their interests, level of understanding and perception. However, taking these differences to the level of enmity and injustice is reproachable.'

We must not therefore mistrust them, nor go after their mistakes to defame or belittle them just because of their differences with us. If we start opposing, declaring as innovator and ridiculing everyone who reaches a certain opinion in a discretionary matter, based on his interpretation of the available evidence, and errs in his judgment or opinion- an error for which not only is he already forgiven by God but might just as well be rewarded by Him- not one of us will be spared. Not every issue is a litmus test for judging the truth or falsehood of people, and there are matters in which there is room for difference of opinion such that each party- in spite of its differences with the other- is considered to be following the truth, as was the case with the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him) on the Day of the Battle of Qurayza. The history of our predecessors is rich with such enlightening instances.

Yunus al Sadafi has been quoted as saying, 'I never saw anyone more rational than al Shafi'i. I debated with him on an issue, and then we parted ways. When he met me again, he held my hand and said, 'O' Abu Musa, wouldn't it be wonderful if we remained brothers, even though we disagree in a certain issue.' [Seer Aalam an Nubala]

Dhahabi commented on this incident, saying, 'This is evidence of the maturity of the Imam's thought and

his deep understanding of his self, for people of insight will always differ with another.'

Ahmad bin Hafs as Sa'adi says that he heard Ahmad bin Hanbal say, 'We did not see anyone coming from Khurasan like Ishaq ibn Rahwaya, even though he opposed us in some matters... for people will always differ with one another in their opinions.' [Seer Aa'lam an Nubala]

Ahmad and Ali bin al Madini disagreed with each other until their voices were raised. When Ali wanted to leave, Ahmad stood up and held on to the rein of his horse (begging him to stay). [Jami Bayan al Ilm wa Fadhihi, Ibn Abdul Barr]

In spite of the differences between the schools of the Ahl al Rai' and the Ahl al Hadeeth, we see Imam Shafi'i praising Imam Abu Hanifa in the following words, 'People are immensely indebted to Abu Hanifa in Fiqh.' [Tahdheeb al Kamal]

This then was the approach of the righteous predecessors. How greatly we are in need of emulating their example and following the guidance they left for us! Maintaining the mutual bonds of community and brotherhood is among the principles of the Deen that we must follow in every stage of our work. We must not let our ties of brotherhood be weakened just because of a mere difference of opinion. We must learn to excuse one another when we disagree, for this helps to close the doors of hatred and mistrust. Allah the Glorious says, 'O' you who believe! When you meet an enemy force, take a firm stand against them and remember the Name of Allah much, so that you may be successful. And obey Allah and His Messenger, and do not dispute with one another lest you lose courage and your strength departs, and be patient. Surely, Allah is with those who are steadfast in patience.' [Al-Anfal]

O' Allah, bestow on us Your grace in this world and in the Hereafter, and save us from the torment of Hellfire.

May peace and blessings be upon our Messenger, Muhammad and his family. O' Allah, be pleased with his honorable Companions and those who follow them till the Day of Judgment.



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