

لَا بَدْعَ إِلَّا السُّنَّةُ

No Innovation. Only Sunnah

Compiled by Abū Muhammad Yaḥyā

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SALAF
THE SAVED PATH

Compiled by Abū Muhammad Yaḥyā

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Author's Preface

All praise is due to Allah alone, Lord of all that exists. I begin this humble work with the sincere intention to seek His pleasure alone, to serve His Book and the guidance of His Messenger ﷺ, to teach myself and my fellow believers, and to deepen my own understanding of His Revelation. I remind myself, before anyone else, that this writing is not for status, fame, nor recognition — but solely to seek His Face, His acceptance, and His forgiveness.

This reminder is for my own heart before it is for others, and I ask Allah to purify my intention from any hidden desires or worldly attachments, and to make every word a testimony for me and not against me on the Day when no soul will benefit except by what Allah has accepted from them.

Du‘ā:

O Allah, I ask You by Your Beautiful Names and Perfect Attributes to make this work sincerely for Your sake, and to accept it from me even with its shortcomings and deficiencies. Make it a means for me and those who read it to draw nearer to You, to reflect deeply upon Your Words, and to act upon what is contained therein.

O Allah, grant us beneficial knowledge, hearts that are humbled before You, and actions that are pure and righteous. Do not make this knowledge a proof against us, but rather a light in our graves, a companion in our loneliness, and a witness for us on the Day we meet You. Ameen.

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Introduction

Islam is complete and perfect, leaving no room for religious innovation or personal desires. Allah said: “This day I have perfected for you your religion, completed My favor upon you, and have approved for you Islām as your religion.”¹ The Prophet ﷺ likewise warned that “...and the worst of affairs are newly-invented matters; and every newly-invented matter is an innovation (bid‘ah), and every innovation is misguidance.”²

Any practice, belief, or ritual newly introduced into the religion—known as bid‘ah—is inherently false, destructive, and without legitimacy and validity. It is not a matter to be taken lightly, for innovation strikes at the very heart of Islām by introducing what Allah never revealed and what His Messenger ﷺ never taught.

The perfection of Islām lies in its divine completeness — it admits neither addition nor subtraction. To assert that a new act of worship or belief was omitted from revelation is, knowingly or unknowingly, to imply that the Dīn was incomplete when Allah Himself declared it perfected, and when the Messenger of Allah ﷺ had fulfilled and completed His Lord’s message and mission.

The Qur’ān further emphasizes that nothing has been left out: Allah said: “And We have neglected nothing in the Book.”³ Thus, all divinely prescribed forms of ‘ibādah (worship) and ‘aqidah (creed) are already fully provided. Introducing a new ḥukm (ruling) or ritual is not an act of devotion, but rather a dangerous claim that Allah’s legislation was deficient and in need of human supplementation.

The Prophet ﷺ, with words both decisive and universal, closed every door to innovation: he ﷺ said: “The worst of affairs are newly-invented matters; and every innovation is misguidance.” Notice that he ﷺ did not say “some innovations” but rather “every innovation,” establishing a clear and absolute principle that the religion cannot be reformed, altered, or enhanced by human effort in any way.

¹ Sūrah al-Mā’idah 5:3

² Reported by: Muslim in his Ṣaḥīḥ (no. 867), Abū Dāwūd (no. 4607), al-Tirmidhī (no. 1106), al-Nasā’ī (no. 1578, 1579), Ibn Mājah (no. 45)

³ Sūrah al-An‘ām 6:38

Imām Mālik رحمه الله said: “Whoever introduces into Islām an innovation which he sees as good has claimed that Muḥammad ﷺ betrayed the message. For Allah said: ‘This day I have perfected for you your religion...’ Whatever was not part of the religion then is not part of the religion today.”⁴

Islām’s beauty is its sufficiency. Allah’s legislation is complete, and His Messenger ﷺ conveyed it in full clarity. Human innovations and desires can never enrich the dīn; they can only corrupt it, mislead those who follow them, and diminish the purity of what Allah revealed. The believer’s safety lies in clinging to the Qur’ān, the Sunnah, and the way and understanding of the pious predecessors by rejecting every addition and alteration, and holding firmly to what Allah has already perfected.

⁴ al-I’tiṣām by al-Shāṭibī, 1/64

The Criterion of The Quran and Sunnah as Understood by the Salaf us-Salih

True guidance lies solely in the Qur'an and the authentic Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ, as understood and practiced by the Companions and the righteous predecessors (as-Salaf as-Ṣāliḥ). This is the only path safeguarded from deviation and innovation. Allah, the Most High, warns: "And whoever opposes the Messenger after guidance has become clear to him, and follows a path other than the way of the believers — We shall leave him to what he has chosen, and burn him in Hell, and what an evil destination."⁵

This āyah establishes two unshakable principles:

1. Salvation is tied to following the Messenger ﷺ.
2. It is inseparable from following the way of the believers—the first generation of this Ummah, the Companions رضي الله عنهم, and those who follow them in righteousness.

The Prophet ﷺ emphasized this foundation, saying: "I have left behind me two things; if you cling to them, you will never go astray: the Book of Allah and my Sunnah."⁶ No one—scholar, ruler, or ordinary Muslim—may legislate acts of worship or beliefs. Islām is complete, and its authority is exclusive to revelation.

Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله said: "Whoever places a law besides the Sharī'ah and thinks it to be religion must be asked to repent; if he does not, he is to be killed. For Allah alone has the right to legislate, and His Messenger ﷺ is the conveyor of His message."⁷ He also said: "The foundation of Ahl al-Sunnah is that religion is only what Allah legislated, and the Messenger ﷺ conveyed. Religion is not taken from opinions, nor from innovations introduced after him."⁸

Imām al-Barbahārī رحمه الله stated in Sharḥ al-Sunnah: "Beware of small innovations, for they grow until they become large. Likewise, every innovation in this Ummah began small, resembling the truth, until it grew and became apparent. Whoever adheres to the Sunnah is saved, and whoever introduces an innovation and glorifies it, has left the Sunnah and the Jama'ah."⁹

⁵ Sūrah al-Nisā' 4:115

⁶ Mālik in al-Muwatta' 1594, al-Ḥākim 318; authenticated by al-Albānī رحمه الله in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi' 2937

⁷ Majmū' al-Fatāwā 28/524

⁸ Majmū' al-Fatāwā 19/192

⁹ Sharḥ al-Sunnah, no. 7

The Role of Evidence and Ijtihād

In the methodology of Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jamā‘ah, every belief, ruling, and act of worship must be established upon sound evidence from the Qur‘ān and the authentic Sunnah. The Salaf understood that revelation alone defines the limits of the Dīn, and that any matter introduced without textual proof (dalīl shar‘ī naqlī) is a doorway to bid‘ah and misguidance. Allah says: “And whatever the Messenger gives you — take it; and whatever he forbids you — abstain from it.”¹⁰

Allah also says: “Then We put you, [O Muhammad], on a clear way of the religion; so follow it, and do not follow the inclinations of those who do not know.”¹¹ These verses make clear that Islam is not subject to human opinion or cultural innovation; its rulings are bound by revelation, not speculation.

Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله clarified this principle, saying: “Innovation stands against reason because reason cannot legislate in religion.”¹² He emphasized that ‘aql (intellect) in Islam is a tool for understanding revelation, not a source of it. When reason attempts to legislate independently, it produces false religion — acts and beliefs that Allah did not permit. This is why the Salaf never allowed ra’y (personal opinion) to become a source of creed or worship. They measured all reasoning by revelation, not revelation by reasoning.

Shaykh Muḥammad Nāṣiruddīn al-Albānī رحمه الله likewise warned that unrestrained ra’y is among the root causes of bid‘ah, since it substitutes divine proof with subjective feeling or “common sense.” He said that much of modern innovation arises when people justify new practices by claiming they “make sense” or “bring good,” while neglecting the principle that goodness (khayr) in religion is only what Allah and His Messenger ﷺ have legislated. The Prophet ﷺ said: “Whoever introduces into this matter of ours that which is not from it — it will be rejected.”¹³ Hence, even if an innovation seems beneficial, it is falsehood if unsupported by authentic proof.

The Salaf defined true ijtihād not as personal creativity, but as disciplined effort to extract rulings directly from revelation. Ibn al-Qayyim رحمه الله explained: “Ijtihād is the exertion of effort to reach the ruling of Allah and His Messenger, not to invent a ruling from oneself.”¹⁴ This process — istikhraj al-aḥkām min dalīl shar‘ī naqlī

¹⁰ Surah al-Ḥashr 59:7

¹¹ Surah al-Jāthiyah 45:18

¹² Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā, 11/343

¹³ al-Bukhārī, no. 2697; Muslim, no. 1718

¹⁴ I‘lām al-Muwaqqi‘in, 1/69

muṭlaq — means that rulings must arise from clear textual evidence, unaltered by custom, emotion, or the trends of the people. Any deviation from this path, whether under the guise of ra’y, “modernization,” or “expediency,” is a step toward bid‘ah.

Shaykh Ṣāliḥ bin Fawzān al-Fawzān حفظه الله further emphasized that the cause of most religious deviations is abandonment of the evidence and imitation of people instead of revelation. He said: “Whoever seeks guidance without knowledge will inevitably fall into innovation, for the religion is not built upon opinions, but upon proofs.”¹⁵ Thus, every belief and act of worship must trace its authority to a textual foundation — the Book of Allah or the authentic Sunnah — as understood by the Companions and those who followed them.

This disciplined adherence to evidence preserves the religion from distortion. It also defines the difference between ijtihād shar‘ī (legitimate deduction within the bounds of revelation) and ijtihād bid‘ī (illegitimate reasoning outside of revelation). The former is guided by the Qur’an, Sunnah, and the understanding of the Salaf; the latter is guided by emotion, convenience, or intellect divorced from textual proof. Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله stated: “There is no place for reasoning in matters where revelation has spoken. Whoever introduces an opinion contrary to the clear text has followed desire and not guidance.”¹⁶

The Prophet ﷺ laid down the decisive principle when he said: “I have left among you two things; you will never go astray as long as you hold fast to them: the Book of Allah and my Sunnah.”¹⁷ This is the very essence of the Salafi approach — to measure every matter by these two sources, and to reject whatever lacks their sanction. For this reason, the Salaf viewed neglect of evidence as the first step toward innovation, and strict textualism as its cure. The heart that submits to revelation is safe; the one that legislates by intellect or desire falls into misguidance. Therefore, ahl as-Sunnah anchor every belief, ruling, and form of worship in authentic proof, preserving the religion exactly as it was revealed — free from the innovations of reasoning, culture, or custom.

¹⁵ al-I‘tiqād as-Ṣaḥīḥ wa-mā Yuḍāduḥ, p. 48

¹⁶ Dar’ Ta‘āruḍ al-‘Aql wa an-Naql, 7/283

¹⁷ al-Muwatta’ of Imām Mālik, 1661

Reliance on Early Precedents

True guidance lies in adhering to the understanding and example of the righteous predecessors (as-Salaf as-Ṣāliḥ), whose practice safeguarded Islām from distortion and innovation. ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنه said: “Whoever among you wishes to follow, let him follow those who have passed away, for they were the Companions of Muḥammad ﷺ — the most righteous of this Ummah, pure in hearts, deep in knowledge, and upon straight guidance.” (Reported by Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr in Jāmi‘ Bayān al-‘Ilm). This statement affirms that no generation after them surpasses the first three in knowledge, understanding, or sincerity.

Imām Mālik رحمه الله, Imām Aḥmad رحمه الله, and those who followed them unanimously agreed that the scholars of the first centuries were superior in faith and comprehension of the revelation. Hence, Ahl as-Sunnah wal-Jamā‘ah are defined as those who adhere to the path of the Companions, the Tābi‘īn, and the major Imāms who followed them. The foundation of rejecting bid‘ah rests upon this very authority — for whatever the Salaf did not consider part of the religion cannot be considered so by anyone after them. As Imām Mālik famously said: “The latter part of this Ummah will never be rectified except by that which rectified its first part.”

The Definition of Bid‘ah (Innovation)

Linguistically, bid‘ah (from the root b-d-‘ [بدع]) means to originate or introduce something without precedent — something new that did not exist before. Allah says: (Badi‘ as-samāwāti wal-ard) “Originator of the heavens and the earth”,¹⁸ meaning He brought them into existence without prior example. Thus, linguistically, bid‘ah can refer to any new matter, whether worldly or religious, praiseworthy or blameworthy.

However, in the Shar‘ī (legislative) sense, bid‘ah refers specifically to every newly introduced belief, statement, or act of worship invented in the religion, intended as a means of drawing nearer to Allah, yet having no evidence or foundation in the Qur’an, the Sunnah, nor in the way of the Companions. It is an addition to the Dīn that Allah did not legislate, and therefore rejected.

Imām Mālik رحمه الله said: “Whoever introduces into Islām an innovation, thinking it good, has claimed that Muḥammad ﷺ betrayed the Message. For Allah has said: ‘This day I have perfected for you your religion.’ So whatever was not part of the religion then is not part of the religion today.” Hence, innovations in religion are

¹⁸ Sūrah al-Baqarah 2:117

misguidance, while new worldly matters — such as tools, means, or technologies — remain permissible unless they contradict revelation.

Allah, the Most High, condemns those who introduce religious legislation without divine authority, saying: “Or do they have partners who have legislated for them in religion that which Allah has not permitted?”¹⁹

This verse exposes the essence of bid‘ah — for every act of worship or belief not legislated by Allah is, in reality, a trespass upon His exclusive right to legislate. However, there is a distinction between the one who unknowingly practices an innovation, imitating others or acting upon misconception, and the one who knowingly invents, promotes, or calls others to a newly legislated matter in the religion. The former’s act remains invalid and rejected, yet he may be excused until clear evidence reaches him; while the latter competes with divine legislation itself, making himself a partner with Allah in tashrī‘ (legislation) — and this is a form of shirk in Allah’s Lordship.

The Prophet ﷺ warned: “Whoever introduces into this matter of ours that which is not from it — it is rejected.”²⁰ Thus, the innovator not only abandons the perfection of Islām but undermines its divine completion. The believer must therefore safeguard his acts of worship, ensuring that every deed rests upon evidence from the Qur’an, the authentic Sunnah, and the understanding of the Salaf — for therein lies true guidance and protection from misguidance and its people.

Also, Ibn al-Qayyim رحمه الله clarified that the term bid‘ah in its Shar‘ī (legal) usage applies only to those religious practices or beliefs that have no basis in revelation. However, in its linguistic sense, the word may refer to any new matter, even if permissible or praiseworthy. This is why when ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb رضي الله عنه gathered the people for Ṣalāt at-Tarāwīḥ behind one imām, he said: “What an excellent bid‘ah this is!” — meaning linguistically new, not innovated. The practice itself was a Sunnah established by the Prophet ﷺ and only revived by ‘Umar, not newly legislated.

By contrast, introducing celebrations such as the Prophet’s birthday (al-Mawlid), altering the prescribed manner of prayer, or adding rituals not found in revelation are examples of Shar‘ī bid‘ah, which the Prophet ﷺ repeatedly warned against, saying: “Whoever introduces into this matter of ours that which is not from it — it will be rejected.”

¹⁹ Sūrah ash-Shūrā 42:21

²⁰ al-Bukhārī 2697, Muslim 1718

Every Innovation is Misguidance

The Prophet ﷺ cut off every avenue of innovation with his decisive words: “The worst of affairs are the newly-invented matters, and every innovation is misguidance.”²¹

Imām Ibn ‘Taymiyyah رحمه الله explained that the Prophet’s wording was all-encompassing: “His saying ‘every innovation is misguidance’ is a concise, universal statement. It is among the most important foundations of the religion. There is no exception to this, for every innovation in worship is misguidance.”²²

Abdullah ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنه stated: “Every bid‘ah is misguidance, even if people perceive it as good”

Rejection of “Good Innovations” (Bid‘ah Ḥasanah)

The concept of a so-called “good innovation” (bid‘ah ḥasanah) has no basis in Islam. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ declared without exception: “Every innovation is misguidance.”²³ Imām Ibn Bāz رحمه الله stated: “There is no good innovation; all innovations are misguidance.” He explained that this prophetic statement is comprehensive — it encompasses all religious innovations without exception. Any act introduced into the religion and claimed as worship cannot be justified or beautified by good intention, for sincerity alone is not enough without conformity to revelation.

The confusion arises from the distinction between linguistic and Shar‘ī usage of the term. When ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb رضي الله عنه described the organized Tarāwīḥ prayer as “an excellent bid‘ah,” he was speaking linguistically, since the practice was revived in a new form but remained rooted in the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ. It was not an innovation in legislation. Therefore, any act newly introduced into worship — having no basis in the Sharī‘ah and not performed by the Prophet ﷺ or his Companions — is rejected, regardless of its appearance or intention. Such practices are not acts of goodness but misguidance, for as the scholars explained: “Every matter introduced into the religion that did not exist in the Sharī‘ah carries no reward, and every newly invented religious practice is blameworthy.” Also, rejecting any classification of it as “good”.

²¹ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, no. 867

²² Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā 3/58

²³ Muslim 867

Condemnation of All Bid‘ah in Creed and Worship

Innovation (bid‘ah) is condemned in every aspect of the religion — whether in ‘aqidah (creed) or ‘ibadah (worship). Innovations in creed are the most dangerous, for they corrupt the foundation of faith itself and may expel a person from the fold of Islām. Innovations in worship, though lesser in degree, remain ḥarām and invalid. Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله explained that altering the fundamentals of tawḥīd or the attributes of Allah constitutes the gravest form of innovation, for it undermines the very essence of revelation. Denying any of Allah’s Names or Attributes, reinterpreting them without proof, or introducing names He did not reveal are examples of bid‘ah kufriyyah (innovation of disbelief).

Likewise, innovations in worship — even those that appear “small” or “harmless,” such as adding extra prostrations, or specifying times and forms of worship without evidence — are categorically rejected. The Prophet ﷺ said: “Whoever does an action that is not in accordance with our affair, it is rejected.”

Shaykh al-Albānī رحمه الله emphasized that this ḥadīth is comprehensive, covering every form of religious innovation — whether in belief or worship — without exception. Thus, bid‘ah in creed corrupts the foundation, often leading to disbelief, while bid‘ah in worship invalidates deeds and incurs sin. Both represent deviations from the perfected religion of Allah, which He completed and sealed through His Messenger ﷺ.

Innovation as a Source of Fitnah

The pious predecessors unanimously regarded bid‘ah (innovation) as one of the greatest causes of fitnah (trial, turmoil, and division) within the Ummah. Its danger lies not only in personal misguidance but in the corruption it spreads throughout the community and world — altering the religion of Allah, dividing the believers, and obscuring the straight path.

Allah warns: “And do not follow the footsteps of Shayṭān. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy.”²⁴ The scholars explained that among the “footsteps of Shayṭān” is adding to what Allah has legislated — adorning falsehood in the guise of piety and persuading and convincing people that they are doing good. Thus, bid‘ah begins as a personal act but ends as a social infection, spreading confusion and fitnah in the Ummah.

²⁴ Surah an-Nūr 24:21

The Prophet ﷺ repeatedly warned of the fitan that would arise from departing from revelation (his Sunnah). He said: “Whoever among you lives long will see much difference. So hold fast to my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs after me. Bite onto it with your molars, and beware of newly introduced matters, for every innovation is misguidance.”²⁵ This warning shows that innovations are the seeds of later divisions, (and despite it appearing fair seeming in the beginning) for every generation that introduces new practices opens the door to dispute and fragmentation.

Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله explained: “Bid‘ah originates from the misguidance of one’s soul, and it is from following desires rather than guidance.”²⁶ It begins when a person’s nafs (desires) interprets the religion without knowledge, preferring emotion, culture, or logic over revealed guidance.

The Qur’an directly attributes such deviation to following desires instead of evidence: “But if they do not respond to you, then know that they only follow their desires. And who is more astray than one who follows his desires without guidance from Allah?”²⁷

Ibn al-Qayyim رحمه الله noted that bid‘ah combines two of the most destructive traits — ignorance and arrogance — because the innovator acts without knowledge yet insists upon the correctness of his way. This dual corruption makes bid‘ah more dangerous than open sin: the sinner knows his error and may repent, but the innovator believes he is upon the truth and thus persists.

For this reason, the Salaf treated bid‘ah not only as a private fault but as a communal threat requiring collective response. Imām ash-Shāṭibī رحمه الله said: “Innovation is the gateway to destruction of the Sharī‘ah, for when innovations appear, the light of the Sunnah fades, until the truth becomes hidden and falsehood appears as truth.”²⁸ Each innovation displaces a portion of the Sunnah, altering the balance of the Dīn and leading to endless disagreements and divisions. Hence, every innovation — no matter how small — opens the door to fitnah, because it creates competing standards of worship, belief, and leadership within the Ummah.

The Salaf viewed bid‘ah as the earliest form of religious chaos. Ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنهما warned: “Every innovation is misguidance, even if the people see it as good.” (ad-Dārimī, no. 210). His statement underscores that the danger lies in its perception

²⁵ Abū Dāwūd, no. 4607; at-Tirmidhī, no. 2676

²⁶ Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā, 3/346

²⁷ Surah al-Qaṣaṣ 28:50

²⁸ al-I‘tiṣām, 1/113

— innovations often appear pious, emotional, or “community-centered,” yet their very existence divides the Ummah into sects. This is why Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله declared: “There is nothing that corrupts the religion of people more than innovation, for it splits their unity, blinds their hearts, and confuses their intellects.” (Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā, 3/268). The proliferation of bid‘ah thus becomes the root of ideological and spiritual fragmentation — every sect claiming sincerity, yet every sect diverging from the clear path.

The Prophet ﷺ foretold this division, saying: “The Jews split into seventy-one sects, the Christians into seventy-two sects, and this Ummah will split into seventy-three sects — all of them in the Fire except one.” When asked who that one saved group was, he replied: “Those who are upon what I and my Companions are upon.”²⁹

This ḥadīth lays bare that the root of fitnah and division arises only when people turn away from the path of the Ṣaḥābah. The Salafi manhaj — which is none other than the manhaj of the Companions — regards steadfast adherence to their understanding as the sole protection against the fragmentation and deviation of the Ummah.

Following this understanding, Shaykh Ṣāliḥ bin Fawzān al-Fawzān حفظه الله said: “Warning against innovation is part of protecting the Ummah from fitnah. Whoever remains silent about innovators deceives the people, for the danger of innovation is greater than the danger of sin.”³⁰ The community’s safety, therefore, depends on collective vigilance — scholars clarifying the truth, students spreading it, and laypeople refraining from gatherings and practices of innovation.

Bid‘ah is not only an isolated act of worship but a spark that ignites trials throughout the Ummah. It begins with a person’s desires, grows through ignorance, and ends with division, hostility, and confusion — which is in direct opposition to Islam. The Qur’an, Sunnah, and the Salaf’s understanding all affirm that innovation undermines the one straight path (ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm) and replaces it with countless diverging routes. For this reason, Salafis regard the fight against bid‘ah as both an individual duty and a communal necessity — a means of protecting the Ummah from collapse and restoring clarity to the religion of Allah.

²⁹ ²⁹ Abū Dāwūd, no. 4597; at-Tirmidhī, no. 2641

³⁰ al-Ijābāt al-Muhimmah

Warning Against Splitting and Innovation

The Qur'an repeatedly warns against following desires and deviating from revelation. Allah says: "So judge between them with justice, and do not follow desire, lest it lead you astray from the path of Allah."³¹ This divine command shows that every deviation begins with desire and ends with division. The Prophet ﷺ likewise warned his followers to remain alert, saying: "Whoever lives among you will see great differences, so upon you is my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs after me. Hold to it firmly, and beware of newly introduced matters, for every innovation is misguidance."³²

This is a call to constant vigilance — to measure every belief and practice by the revealed texts, not by people's emotions or customs. The early scholars observed that when disputes arose among Muslims, particularly concerning the Qur'an and the Sunnah, those who left the clear guidance of the Salaf began accusing one another of misguidance. Later generations revived unity by returning to the original sources and abandoning innovation and its people.

Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله explained, that the people of innovation always arrive with rationalizations — claiming their practices are harmless, "moderate," or culturally acceptable. But no act of worship can be deemed good if it lacks evidence from the Book and Sunnah. Whoever claims that an act of worship is acceptable without proof has opposed the Messenger ﷺ, for goodness in religion is only what Allah and His Messenger have legislated. Therefore, true vigilance means guarding one's creed and worship by revelation, not by sentiment — for the standard of truth is the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the understanding of the Salaf, not the mere opinions of men.

The People of Innovation – Misguided and Subject to Allah's Anger

Whoever practices bid'ah (innovation) in the religion has deliberately deviated from the path of guidance, and such deviation is not a mere mistake but a corruption of the very essence of the Dīn. Its danger lies not only in personal misguidance but in spreading falsehood under the guise of worship, thereby inviting others to follow a path Allah never legislated. The Prophet ﷺ warned of this dire state, saying: "Allah has withheld repentance from every person of innovation until he abandons his innovation."³³

This narration highlights the extreme gravity of bid'ah. Whereas the sinner recognizes his disobedience and may repent, the innovator often perceives his act as

³¹ Sūrah Ṣād 38:26

³² Abū Dāwūd 4607, at-Tirmidhī 2676

³³ Ibn Abī 'Āṣim in as-Sunnah, authenticated by al-Albānī رحمه الله

obedience and virtue. His deception blinds him to his own error, closing the door of repentance until he abandons what he falsely believes to be good. Thus, bid‘ah is more destructive than sin — for the sinner feels shame and remorse, while the innovator feels pride in his misguidance, earning the anger of Allah for altering His perfected religion.

The Salaf’s Warnings on Bid‘ah and its People

The Salaf were united in their unwavering stance against innovation and its people, regarding bid‘ah as one of the greatest threats to the purity of Islam. Allah commands the believers to separate from those who divide the religion: “Indeed, those who split up their religion and become sects — you have nothing to do with them. Their affair is only with Allah.”³⁴

Imām al-Ājurri رحمه الله commented on this verse, saying: “Allah commanded His Prophet ﷺ to disassociate from the people of division. Likewise, those who follow him must disassociate from the innovators who oppose his Sunnah.”³⁵ This command establishes a foundational principle: separation from the people of innovation is not harshness or extremism — it is a form of protection of the ḥaqq (truth) from bāṭil (falsehood).

This principle was not theoretical; it was lived and enforced by the earliest generations. When the Qadariyyah (those who denied Qadar) appeared, ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنهما refused even to speak to them. He said: “Inform them that I am free from them, and they are free from me. If one of them were to spend gold equal to Mount Uhud, Allah would not accept it until he believes in Qadar.”³⁶ This represents one of the earliest recorded examples of barā’ (disassociation) from innovators for the sake of preserving the foundations of faith.

Similarly, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī رحمه الله, when asked about sitting with the Qadariyyah, said: “Do not sit with them, nor greet them. For they cause doubts in the hearts.”³⁷ He understood that mere companionship with the people of bid‘ah could weaken the heart and plant seeds of doubt, and thus avoidance was not isolationism but ‘ibādah (worship).

Likewise, Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr رحمه الله said: “If a person of bid‘ah greets you with salām, do not respond, for he is plotting against you.”³⁸ The Salaf did not view innovators

³⁴ Surah al-An‘ām 6:159

³⁵ Ash-Sharī‘ah, 1/315

³⁶ Muslim, no. 93

³⁷ Reported by al-Lālikā‘ī, Sharḥ Uṣūl I’tiqād Ahl as-Sunnah, 1/132

³⁸ Ibn Baṭṭah, al-Ibānah al-Kubrā, 2/470

as merely misguided companions — they viewed them as carriers of a spiritual disease capable of infecting the pure heart of the believer.

Their concern and intention were not social division, but preservation of the truth itself. Ibn Sīrīn رحمه الله warned: “Do not listen to the people of desires, nor debate them, for I fear that they will throw into your hearts what they themselves have fallen into.”³⁹ He also said: “This knowledge is religion, so look from whom you take your religion.”⁴⁰ The heart remains sound when it is protected from doubt and desires, and thus the Salaf distanced themselves from innovators to preserve ‘ilm (knowledge) and ‘aqīdah (belief).

The Salaf also understood that it was not enough to protect themselves individually — they had to warn others. This became known as the methodology of *tahdhīr* wa *hajr* (warning and avoidance). Al-Fuḍayl ibn ‘Iyād رحمه الله said: “Whoever honors an innovator has aided in the destruction of Islam.”⁴¹ He also said: “If you see a person of innovation walking on a path, take another path.”⁴² Such strong language demonstrates that *hajr* (boycotting) was never rooted in hatred or arrogance; rather, it was a protective mechanism meant to shield the Sunnah from contamination and to preserve the community’s purity of belief.

This understanding was carried forward and codified by the scholars of later generations. Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله said: “The people of Sunnah are the most merciful to the creation — yet they are the most severe in separating from the innovators, because they know that mercy to them is in warning against their falsehood.”⁴³ Thus, *tahdhīr* (warning) and *hajr* (separation) were not acts of division, but acts of mercy — for protecting others from *fitnah* is a mercy.

In our times, Shaykh Ṣāliḥ bin Fawzān al-Fawzān حفظه الله reaffirmed this, saying: “It is obligatory to warn against the people of innovation. This is from sincere advice (*naṣīḥah*) to Allah, His Book, and His Messenger, and from defending the religion.”⁴⁴

Similarly, Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Bāz رحمه الله said: “It is not permissible to cooperate with innovators, nor to praise them or defend them. Rather, it is from sincerity to Allah to expose their falsehood and warn against them.”⁴⁵ This extension of the Salafi principle into the *fiqh* of *al-walā’ wal-barā’* (loyalty and disavowal)

³⁹ al-Ibānah, 2/438

⁴⁰ Muslim, Muqaddimah

⁴¹ Sharḥ Uṣūl I’tiqād, 1/139

⁴² al-Ibānah, 2/476

⁴³ Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā, 28/205

⁴⁴ al-Ijābāt al-Muhimmah, p. 132

⁴⁵ Fatāwā Ibn Bāz, 3/88

clarifies that loyalty belongs to Ahl as-Sunnah, and disassociation is from Ahl al-Bid‘ah.

At the heart of this methodology lies firm adherence (luzūm) to the truth. Imām Mālik رحمه الله said: “The Sunnah is like the Ark of Nūḥ. Whoever embarks upon it is saved, and whoever refuses is drowned.”⁴⁶ This analogy captures the entire essence of the Salafi path: survival depends on steadfast adherence to the Sunnah. Al-Awzā‘ī رحمه الله emphasized this further, saying: “Cling to the truth, even if the people abandon you. Beware of people, even if they claim to be upon the truth.”⁴⁷ True safety lies not in numbers or popularity, but in remaining upon the evidence and the path of the early generations, even if one stands alone.

From these evidences, a few principles can be summarized as follows:

- (1) Separation (hajr) from innovators and their gatherings.
- (2) Warning (tahdhīr) against their ideas and influence.
- (3) Preservation (ḥifẓ) of the pure Sunnah through isolation from deviant thought.
- (4) Adherence (luzūm) to the truth and those upon it; and
- (5) Transmission (tablīgh) — spreading authentic knowledge so that the truth becomes clear. This structured approach ensured that the truth remained distinct and untainted across generations.

The Salaf did not merely refute bid‘ah — they isolated it. Their method was tanzīh ad-Dīn (purifying the religion), as commanded by Allah: “And purify your garments”⁴⁸ meaning — as Ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنهما explained — “purify your deeds from shirk and innovation.”⁴⁹ Thus, the Salaf understood that preserving the Dīn requires active purification, separating the pure from the impure, the true from the false. Their warnings were an act of mercy to the Ummah and a shield against corruption, trials and tribulations. Whoever follows their path in truth inherits both their firmness and their mercy — upholding the ḥaqq through clarity, warning, and unwavering adherence to the Sunnah.

⁴⁶ Sharḥ Uṣūl I’tiqād, 1/121

⁴⁷ Reported by Ibn ‘Asākir, Tārīkh Dimashq

⁴⁸ Surah al-Muddaththir 74:4

⁴⁹ Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī, 23/244

The Position of the Salaf on the Innovator's Condition

‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd رضى الله عنه warned: “You will encounter people at the end of time who will adopt bid‘ah as the Sunnah, and they will abandon the Sunnah saying, ‘This is innovation.’”⁵⁰ And this is realized in every age where innovators replace pure revelation with corrupt practices and then present them as “the true way,” deceiving the masses.

Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal رحمه الله said: “The graves of Ahl al-Sunnah are gardens, and the graves of Ahl al-Bid‘ah are pits. The people of the Sunnah are Allah’s allies, and the pietists of bid‘ah are His enemies.”⁵¹ This striking statement draws a clear distinction: those who preserve the Sunnah are the awliyā’ (allies) of Allah, while those who innovate—even with outward piety—stand in opposition to Him.

Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله said: “The majority of the people of bid‘ah are more harmful to the Ummah than sinful people. For the sinner recognizes his sin and may repent, while the innovator believes that what he is upon is truth, so he rarely repents.”⁵² Imām al-Barbahārī رحمه الله stated: “Beware of small innovations, for they grow until they become large. Every innovation in this Ummah began small, resembling the truth, until it became widespread and apparent.”⁵³

Ibn Battah al-‘Ukbarī رحمه الله warned: “The innovator does not repent, for repentance requires abandoning what one believes to be religion, and this is the most difficult thing upon the soul.”⁵⁴ Ahl al-Bid‘ah occupy a uniquely dangerous position in Islām. They are not merely mistaken; they are in direct opposition to revelation, threatened with Allah’s wrath for altering His Dīn. By introducing practices into Islām, they imply a deficiency in what Allah perfected, thus incurring severe blame. Worse still, they invite others to their misguidance, multiplying and compounding the sin and its consequence.

The Prophet ﷺ warned of this destructive ripple effect: “Whoever calls to misguidance will bear a burden of sin like those who follow him, without it detracting from their sins at all.”⁵⁵

Thus, innovators not only endanger themselves but also drag others into the Fire.

⁵⁰ Al-Dārimī in Sunan al-Dārimī 1/64, ḥasan chain

⁵¹ See: Ibn al-Jawzī, Manāqib al-Imām Aḥmad

⁵² Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā 11/472

⁵³ Sharḥ al-Sunnah, no. 7

⁵⁴ al-Ibānah al-Kubrā 1/349

⁵⁵ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, no. 2674

Prophetic Model of Disavowal

The Prophet ﷺ himself established the clearest model of *barāʾ* (disavowal) from innovation and its people, demonstrating that opposition to *bidʿah* is not a later scholarly development but an essential Prophetic Sunnah. He ﷺ warned his Ummah with precision and compassion, making the principle of rejecting every newly introduced matter a continuing obligation upon all generations. Among his most decisive statements is the ḥadīth: “Whoever introduces into this matter of ours that which is not from it — it will be rejected.”⁵⁶ This narration defines the entire framework for dealing with innovation: any act or belief not rooted in revelation is void in the sight of Allah, regardless of its intention, popularity, or appearance of goodness. The Prophet ﷺ also said: “Whoever performs an act not in accordance with our affair (i.e., our religion), it will be rejected.”⁵⁷ This repetition in both wording and meaning emphasizes that *bidʿah* is invalid both in origin and in execution. The Sunnah, therefore, not only forbids innovation but nullifies its effects; it neither earns reward nor brings closeness to Allah. By this standard, the Prophet ﷺ established a principle of separation for the true believers.

The Prophet ﷺ also foretold the emergence of innovators within this Ummah and commanded the believers to be cautious of them. In one narration, he said: “There will appear among my Ummah people who will speak with that which neither you nor your forefathers have heard before; so beware of them.”⁵⁸ This profound warning clarifies that *bidʿah* arises from within the Ummah itself — when people begin to speak, act, or legislate in the religion without authentic proof from revelation. The Prophet’s words “beware of them” (*fa-iyyākum wa-iyyāhum*) establish *taḥdhīr* — warning against innovators — as a Sunnah-based obligation. Thus, the believer is to distance himself not only from the act of innovation but also from those who promote and defend it, safeguarding both his creed and his heart from corruption.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ also demonstrated this disavowal through his stance toward the early Qadariyyah — those who denied Allah’s decree (*Qadar*). When informed of their statements, he said: “They are the Magians of this Ummah; if they fall ill, do not visit them; if they die, do not attend their funerals.”⁵⁹ This firm position clarifies that social and communal detachment from innovators is not a matter of hostility but a means of protecting the Ummah and one self from *fitnah*. It also serves as explicit Prophetic evidence for the legitimacy of *hajr* (boycotting) innovators — a

⁵⁶ al-Bukhārī, no. 2697; Muslim, no. 1718

⁵⁷ Muslim, no. 1718

⁵⁸ Aḥmad in al-Musnad, 4/102; authenticated by al-Albānī in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmiʿ*, no. 3609

⁵⁹ Abū Dāwūd, no. 4691; Ibn Mājah, no. 92; authenticated by al-Albānī

practice carried by the Salaf and their successors as a continuation of the Prophetic model.

The Prophet ﷺ's supplications further reveal his deep concern for safeguarding the Ummah from the misguidance of bid'ah. Among his du'ā' was: "O Allah, show us the truth as truth and grant us the ability to follow it, and show us falsehood as falsehood and grant us the ability to avoid it."⁶⁰ This supplication reflects the essence of disavowal: seeking refuge from deception and from innovations that masquerade as truth. The Prophet ﷺ's consistent plea for clarity shows that the believer's safety lies in distinguishing, not blending, the pure Sunnah with human invention.

The ḥadīth of al-'Irbād ibn Sāriyah رضي الله عنه provides further evidence of this Prophetic model. The Prophet ﷺ said: "I enjoin you to fear Allah and to hear and obey, even if an Abyssinian slave were placed in authority over you. For indeed, whoever among you lives long will see many differences. So hold fast to my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs after me; bite onto it with your molars, and beware of newly introduced matters, for every innovation is misguidance."⁶¹ The command "beware of newly introduced matters" (wa iyyākum wa muḥdathāt al-umūr) directly links obedience to Allah with disavowal of innovation. The Prophet ﷺ did not stop at recommending the Sunnah — he made avoidance of bid'ah an inseparable condition of following it.

This Prophetic framework established three essential actions for safeguarding the religion:

- (1) Clarification — exposing innovations and distinguishing them from the Sunnah;
- (2) Warning — advising the believers to avoid both the people and the practices of bid'ah; and
- (3) Disavowal — publicly and inwardly renouncing every innovation to protect oneself and preserve the purity of the Dīn.

The scholars who inherited this methodology — from the noble Companions to the later 'ulamā' — regarded it as a continuous Sunnah principle (aṣl min uṣūl as-sunnah). Imām al-Barbahārī رحمه الله said: "Know that the foundation of the Sunnah is to hold fast to that which the Companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ were upon, and to avoid innovations, for every innovation is misguidance."⁶²

⁶⁰ al-Bayhaqī in *Shu'ab al-Īmān*, 7/477

⁶¹ Abū Dāwūd, no. 4607; at-Tirmidhī, no. 2676

⁶² *Sharḥ as-Sunnah*

Therefore, the prohibition of bid‘ah and disavowal of its people are not mere scholarly preferences or as some may deem as harshness — they are a direct extension of the Prophet’s ﷺ example. His warnings, supplications, and actions all demonstrate that safeguarding the Sunnah requires rejecting every newly introduced matter — which is misguidance. In doing so, the believer aligns himself with the Prophetic legacy of purity, vigilance, and obedience, ensuring that the Dīn remains as it was revealed — unaltered, uncorrupted, and protected until the Day of Judgment.

Avoiding the Innovators and Their Gatherings

The Sahabah:

‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنهما said: “Do not sit with the people of desires, for their gatherings make the heart sick.”⁶³

‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنهما regarding the Qadariyyah: “If you meet them, tell them: I am free from you and you are free from me. By the One in Whose Hand is the soul of Ibn ‘Umar, if one of them had gold equal to Mount Uḥud and spent it, Allah would not accept it until he believes in Qadar.”⁶⁴

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib رضي الله عنه said about the Khawārij: “Do not sit with them, for whoever sits with them, shares in their misguidance.”⁶⁵

The Ṭābi‘īn and Their Students

al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī رحمه الله said: “Do not sit with the people of desires, nor argue with them, nor listen to them.”⁶⁶

Muḥammad ibn Sīrīn رحمه الله said: “Do not sit with the people of desires, nor debate with them, nor listen to them.”⁶⁷

Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyānī رحمه الله said: “Indeed, from the success of a youth or non-Arab is that Allah guides him to a scholar of Sunnah, so he holds fast to him.” And he said: “Do not sit with the people of desires, nor argue with them, for I fear that they will immerse you in their misguidance.”⁶⁸

⁶³ al-Lālikā’ī, Sharḥ Uṣūl al-I’tiqād 1/132, no. 238, with a ṣaḥīḥ isnād

⁶⁴ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, no. 8

⁶⁵ Reported by al-Ājurri, al-Sharī‘ah 1/325

⁶⁶ al-Lālikā’ī, Sharḥ Uṣūl al-I’tiqād 1/133, no. 244

⁶⁷ al-Dārimī, Sunan 1/121

⁶⁸ al-Lālikā’ī, Sharḥ Uṣūl al-I’tiqād 1/133, nos. 246–247

The Imams of the Salaf

al-Fuḍayl ibn ‘Iyāḍ رحمه الله said: “Do not sit with an innovator, for I fear that the curse will descend upon you.”⁶⁹

He also said: “Whoever sits with a person of innovation has not been given wisdom. I love that there was a fortress of iron between me and the people of desires.”⁷⁰

Sufyān al-Thawrī رحمه الله said: “Whoever listens to an innovator has left the protection of Allah, and is entrusted to himself.”⁷¹

Imām Mālik رحمه الله said: “Do not sit with the people of desires, nor argue with them, for I fear that they will immerse you in their misguidance or confuse you in the religion.”⁷²

Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal رحمه الله said: “Do not sit with the people of innovation or comfort yourself with them. Beware of debating them, for they corrupt the heart.”⁷³

Imām al-Barbahārī رحمه الله said: “If you see a man sitting with a person of innovation, beware of him, and inform others to beware of him. The people of innovation are like scorpions: they conceal their stingers until they can strike.”⁷⁴

‘Abdullāh ibn al-Mubārak رحمه الله said: “Whoever lowers himself to an innovator has thrown Islām behind his back.”⁷⁵

Ibn Battah al-‘Ukbarī رحمه الله said: “Indeed, the Salaf used to detest sitting with the people of innovation, looking into their books, or listening to their words.”⁷⁶

al-Ājurri رحمه الله said: “When the people of desires show humility in speech, do not be deceived. Beware of their gatherings, for they are harmful to the heart.”⁷⁷

⁶⁹ al-Lālikā’i, Sharḥ Uṣūl al-I’tiqād 1/139, no. 261

⁷⁰ al-Ājurri, al-Sharī’ah 1/453

⁷¹ Abū Nu’aym, Ḥilyat al-Awliyā’ 7/26

⁷² al-Ājurri, al-Sharī’ah 1/453

⁷³ al-Lālikā’i, Sharḥ Uṣūl al-I’tiqād 1/134, no. 250

⁷⁴ Sharḥ al-Sunnah, no. 69

⁷⁵ al-Lālikā’i, Sharḥ Uṣūl al-I’tiqād 1/139, no. 260

⁷⁶ al-Ībānah al-Kubrā 2/444

⁷⁷ al-Sharī’ah 1/451

Adherence to the Sunnah – The Only Safe Way

The Prophetic Sunnah is the fortress of Islām and the only safe path for the believer. Whenever division arises, and innovation spreads, protection lies in clinging firmly to what the Messenger ﷺ brought and what his Companions رضي الله عنهم practiced.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ foretold times of divergence and turmoil, and gave the solution: “Whoever among you lives will see much difference. So hold fast to my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs after me. Bite onto it with your molars. Beware of newly-invented matters, for every innovation is misguidance.”⁷⁸ This ḥadīth is decisive: when division arises, salvation is only in strict adherence to the Sunnah and the example of the first Caliphs—Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, and ‘Alī رضي الله عنهم.

The Salaf on Adhering to the Sunnah

‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd رضي الله عنه said: “Follow and do not innovate. For you have been sufficed, and every innovation is misguidance.”⁷⁹

‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb رضي الله عنه said: “The Sunnah is what protects Islām.”⁸⁰

Imām al-Awzā‘ī رحمه الله said: “Hold fast to the narrations from the Salaf, even if people reject you. Beware of the opinions of men, even if they beautify them with words.”⁸¹

Sufyān al-Thawrī رحمه الله said: “Cling to the Sunnah, for it is your protection. Take knowledge from the people of Sunnah, for they are the trustworthy ones.”⁸²

Imām al-Barbahārī رحمه الله said: “Know that Islām is the Sunnah, and the Sunnah is Islām. One is not established without the other.”⁸³

Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله emphasized: “The foundation of Ahl al-Sunnah wa’l-Jamā‘ah is to adhere to what the Prophet ﷺ was upon and what the first generation was upon. They cling to that, and they are the Saved Sect.”⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Abū Dāwūd, no. 4607; al-Tirmidhī, no. 2676; authenticated by al-Albānī رحمه الله in *Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, 3851

⁷⁹ al-Dārimī, *Sunan*, 211; al-Ājurrī, *al-Sharī‘ah* 1/225

⁸⁰ Reported by Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *Jāmi‘ Bayān al-‘Ilm*, 2/118

⁸¹ al-Khallāl, *al-Sunnah*, no. 1366

⁸² al-Lālikā‘ī, *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-‘Itiqād*, 1/64

⁸³ *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*, no. 38

⁸⁴ *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā* 3/347

Signs of True Knowledge

Among the clearest signs of true knowledge in the methodology of the Salaf is opposition to bid‘ah and defence of the Sunnah. The early scholars said: “The people of desires are the people of misguidance, and the people of the Sunnah are the people of guidance.”⁸⁵ For this reason, the Salaf regarded standing against bid‘ah as a sign of sincerity, sound faith (emaan), and authentic scholarship. Whoever truly possesses knowledge of the Qur‘an and Sunnah will naturally defend them and refuse to accommodate falsehood.

Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal رحمه الله said: “If you see a man speaking ill of the people of ḥadīth, know that he is upon innovation.”⁸⁶ He understood that love for the Sunnah and its people, and enmity toward innovation and its people, reflect the purity of one’s ‘aqidah. Likewise, Imām al-Barbahārī رحمه الله stated: “If you hear a man mention an innovator with praise, beware of him; for he wants to deceive you.”⁸⁷ Such vigilance was, to the Salaf, a necessary part of knowledge — for they viewed every scholar as a shepherd responsible for protecting the flock from deviation. To them, silence in the face of bid‘ah was betrayal, while warning against it was a sign of piety and competence in the Dīn.

The Qur‘an ties true knowledge directly to fear and obedience of Allah: “Only those who fear Allah from among His servants are those who have knowledge.”⁸⁸ Ibn al-Qayyim رحمه الله explained that this fear manifests as tanzīh ad-Dīn — purifying the religion from impurity and innovation. In this sense, opposing bid‘ah is not simply academic debate but a devotional act of worship, part of enjoining good and forbidding evil (amr bil-ma‘rūf wa-nahy ‘an al-munkar). The Prophet ﷺ said: “Whoever among you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; if he cannot, then with his tongue; if he cannot, then with his heart — and that is the weakest of faith.”⁸⁹ The righteous salaf considered bid‘ah among the greatest of evils to be opposed, since it corrupts worship and alters the religion itself.

Imām Sufyān ath-Thawrī رحمه الله said: “Innovation is more beloved to Iblīs than sin, for sin is repented from, but innovation is not.”⁹⁰ This is why warning against innovators was viewed as a trait of sound imān. Ibn Sīrīn رحمه الله said: “They did not use to ask about the isnād, but when the fitnah occurred, they said, ‘Name for us

⁸⁵ al-Lālikā’ī in Sharḥ Uṣūl I’tiqād Ahl as-Sunnah, 1/60

⁸⁶ Sharḥ Uṣūl I’tiqād, 1/139

⁸⁷ Sharḥ as-Sunnah

⁸⁸ Surah Fāṭir 35:28

⁸⁹ Muslim, no. 49

⁹⁰ al-İbānah al-Kubrā, 2/482

your men.’ So we would look — if he was from Ahl as-Sunnah we accepted, and if from the people of innovation we rejected.”⁹¹ This careful discernment was born from knowledge; only those grounded in revelation can distinguish truth from falsehood and know when to speak or withhold.

The Salaf further held that abandoning bid‘ah and isolating oneself from the people of bid‘ah is among the signs that a person truly follows the Sunnah. Al-Fuḍayl ibn ‘Iyāḍ رحمه الله said: “If you see a man of the Sunnah walking on your path, you will love him; and if you see a man of innovation, you will detest him — for the hearts are upon the fitrah.”⁹² Thus, love and hate for the sake of Allah are inseparable from knowledge — and the knowledgeable one who understands the religion distinguishes people based on their alignment with revelation. Moreover, the scholars regarded tahdhīr (warning) against innovators as part of farḍ kifāyah — a collective obligation upon the Ummah. Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله said: “Clarifying the condition of the people of bid‘ah and warning against them is from jihād in the path of Allah; it is part of protecting the religion.”⁹³ Thus, enjoining the forbidding of bid‘ah is not optional advice but a religious duty, inherited by every generation of the Salaf. Those who possess knowledge must uphold it publicly, for concealing the truth or compromising with innovators leads to the spread of misguidance and evil.

Conversely, those who mix with innovators or defend them are warned to repent. Imām al-Awzā‘ī رحمه الله said: “Whoever hides an innovator out of fear or flattery has betrayed Islam.”⁹⁴ This uncompromising attitude was not driven by hatred but by mercy — for the scholar who warns protects the ignorant, and the one who stays silent allows fitnah to multiply. Hence, true knowledge manifests not only in teaching and writing but in ghayrah ‘alā ad-Dīn — protective jealousy for Allah’s religion.

In summary, opposing bid‘ah and warning against its people are defining traits of genuine scholars and sincere seekers of knowledge. The people of the Sunnah are recognized by their clarity, firmness, and love for the truth; the people of desires are recognized by their confusion, excuses, and attachment to innovation. The Salafi manhaj thus links knowledge and action inseparably — to know the truth is to defend it, to recognize falsehood is to reject it. As the Salaf said: “Whoever truly knows the Sunnah will never prefer anything over it.” True knowledge is not passive awareness but active protection — of the creed, the Sunnah, and the unity of the Ummah upon the clear path of guidance.

⁹¹ Muslim, Muqaddimah

⁹² Sharḥ Uṣūl I’tiqād, 1/138

⁹³ Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā, 28/231

⁹⁴ al-Ibānah, 2/474

Unity of the Salafī Manhaj

True Islamic unity (al-ittihād ‘alā al-ḥaqq) rests upon the Qur’an, the Sunnah, and the understanding of the Salaf. Any unity not founded upon these pillars is false and fleeting. Allah commands: “And hold firmly to the rope of Allah all together and be not divided.”⁹⁵ This verse establishes the foundation of Muslim cohesion: it is not unity for its own sake, but unity upon revelation. Imām Ibn Kathīr رحمه الله explained: “Allah commands them to remain united upon the truth and forbids division, for unity upon the truth is mercy, and division upon falsehood is punishment.”⁹⁶ Thus, the rope of Allah is the Qur’an and the Sunnah, and clinging to it means adherence to revelation in both creed and practice.

The Salaf understood that innovations are the sharpest blades that sever this rope. Every act of bid‘ah introduces a new authority, a new path, and a new loyalty outside the revelation of Allah. Al-Shāṭibī رحمه الله defined innovation in al-I’tisām as “a fabricated way in religion, resembling the Shari‘ah, intended for worship of Allah.” He explained that this is precisely what shatters unity, for the innovator invents a path that competes with the one Allah revealed. Therefore, preserving unity requires rejecting everything that mingles truth with falsehood — for such mixture destroys the very identity of Islam. The scholars of the Salaf held that ittibā‘ (following the Sunnah) is the only path to i’tisām (holding firmly to Allah’s rope), while ibtidā‘ (innovation) is the seed of division and enmity.

The Qur’an warns repeatedly against those who introduce divisions into the Dīn: “Indeed, those who have divided their religion and become sects — you have nothing to do with them.”⁹⁷ Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله said: “All division in religion originates from following desires and innovating in the religion, not from following revelation.”⁹⁸ In another place he said: “The unity of the Muslims can never be achieved except through the Sunnah, and their division is caused by innovation.”⁹⁹

Thus, the Salafī manhaj views every innovation as a form of ḥirābah fī ad-Dīn — a kind of theft and corruption within the religion itself, for it steals from the Dīn its clarity and singularity.

Shaykh Ṣāliḥ bin Fawzān al-Fawzān حفظه الله explained: “Unity is achieved by following the truth, not by gathering upon falsehood. Whoever abandons the Sunnah

⁹⁵ Surah Āl ‘Imrān 3:103

⁹⁶ Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr, 2/91

⁹⁷ Surah al-An‘ām 6:159

⁹⁸ Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā, 3/346

⁹⁹ Minhāj as-Sunnah an-Nabawiyyah, 5/158

and introduces innovations is the true cause of division among the Muslims.”¹⁰⁰ Likewise, Shaykh Ibn Bāz رحمه الله said: “The call to unity is only valid when it is upon the truth; unity upon falsehood is blameworthy and forbidden.”¹⁰¹ Reiterating one creed, one methodology. The Prophet ﷺ warned that division is inevitable when innovations spread: “Whoever lives among you will see great differences; so hold fast to my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs after me. Bite onto it with your molars, and beware of newly introduced matters, for every innovation is misguidance.”¹⁰² This ḥadīth links the preservation of unity directly to adherence to the Sunnah and the abandonment of innovation. As the Salaf observed, no innovation appears except that an equivalent portion of Sunnah disappears; no sect arises except that it tears the fabric of the Ummah.

The Muslims’ understanding of revelation must be one — derived from the first generations and protected from later distortions. Ibn al-Qayyim رحمه الله said: “The foundation of the religion is one, the path is one, the God is one, the Prophet is one; the divergence comes only from following desires and abandoning the Sunnah.”¹⁰³ Hence, bid‘ah is not only an error in worship — it is a fracture in the unity of the Ummah, because it introduces competing ways to approach Allah. For this reason, the Salaf maintained that real Jamā‘ah (community) is defined not by numbers but by truth. ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd رضي الله عنه said: “The Jamā‘ah is what agrees with the truth, even if you are alone.”¹⁰⁴ This concise statement encapsulates the Salafi ethos: unity without truth is falsehood, and truth without followers remains the true unity. The Qur’an calls this *ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* — the straight path of those whom Allah has favored, not of those who have earned His anger or gone astray.

The Salafi manhaj understands unity as the product of *itibā‘* (following) and innovation as the product of *ibtidā‘* (inventing). Innovations, by definition, disrupt unity, fragment the Ummah, and introduce foreign concepts into the Dīn. Upholding unity, therefore, requires rejecting innovation in every form, whether doctrinal, devotional, or methodological. The Qur’an’s command to “hold firmly to the rope of Allah” is not fulfilled by compromise but by fidelity — fidelity to revelation, to the Sunnah, and to the understanding of the Salaf. Only through this unwavering adherence can the Ummah regain its divinely ordained unity and safeguard the oneness (*ūḥdiyyah*) of its religion.

¹⁰⁰ *Sharḥ al-‘Aqīdah al-Wāsiṭiyyah*, 1/83

¹⁰¹ *Fatāwā Ibn Bāz*, 28/100

¹⁰² *Abū Dāwūd*, no. 4607; *at-Tirmidhī*, no. 2676

¹⁰³ *Miftāḥ Dār as-Sa‘ādah*, 1/58

¹⁰⁴ Reported by Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh Dimashq*

Islām Returning as Something Strange

The Prophet ﷺ also said: “Indeed, Islām began as something strange, and it will return to being strange as it began. So glad tidings to the strangers.”¹⁰⁵

‘Ā’ishah رضي الله عنها explained that the “strangers” are: “Those who purify and correct what the people have corrupted of my Sunnah after me.”¹⁰⁶

Thus, the saved ones in every age are those who revive the Sunnah, repair its distortions, and remain steadfast upon it even when most people abandon it.

Upholding the Salafi Creed for Ever (Closing the Path of Innovation)

The preservation of the Salafi creed (‘aqīdah salafiyyah) requires constant vigilance, for the Dīn of Allah is protected only through adherence, clarification, and renewal of the original principles upon which the early generations stood. The Salaf understood that falsehood never rests; therefore, the people of truth must never cease defending it.

Allah says: “So hold fast to that which has been revealed to you. Indeed, you are on a straight path.”¹⁰⁷ This command establishes that safeguarding revelation is not a one-time act but a lifelong duty — clinging firmly to the Qur’an and the Sunnah, resisting every attempt to alter them.

The Prophet ﷺ likewise said: “There will never cease to be a group from my Ummah manifest upon the truth; those who oppose them will not harm them until the command of Allah comes.”¹⁰⁸ This hadith guarantees that a group upon the Salafi creed will persist until the Day of Judgment — steadfast in clarifying the Sunnah and refuting innovation.

The Salaf viewed tabyīn al-bid‘ah (clarifying innovation) as a perpetual farḍ kifāyah — a collective obligation upon every generation. Imām Ibn Baṭṭah رحمه الله summarized this responsibility in decisive words: “He who supports people of innovation, defends them, or sits with them — even if he outwardly appears to follow the Salafi methodology — he will be treated with them.”¹⁰⁹ This statement reflects the uncompromising stance of the Salaf: alliances and companionship in the religion must be based on truth, not based on sympathy, culture or associations. To remain

¹⁰⁵ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, no. 145

¹⁰⁶ Reported by al-Ṭabarānī in al-Mu‘jam al-Kabīr, 24/252, with a sound isnād according to al-Haythamī in Majma‘ al-Zawā‘id, 7/282

¹⁰⁷ Surah az-Zukhruf 43:43

¹⁰⁸ Muslim, no. 1920

¹⁰⁹ al-Ibānah al-Kubrā, 2/476

neutral or silent in the face of bid‘ah is to indirectly strengthen it, for silence emboldens falsehood and weakens clarity. Ibn Baṭṭāh’s warning is therefore not merely disciplinary — it is part of one’s methodology and belief, emphasizing that loyalty (walā’) belongs exclusively to the people of the Sunnah and disavowal (barā’) to the people of innovation.

The scholars of later times reaffirmed this obligation. Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz ibn Bāz رحمه الله said: “Clarifying the truth and warning against falsehood is obligatory upon the scholars in every time and place. Whoever remains silent about innovators while possessing knowledge has betrayed the trust of knowledge.”¹¹⁰ Shaykh Ṣāliḥ bin Fawzān al-Fawzān حفظه الله stated: “Combating innovation is among the greatest forms of jihād, for through it the religion of Allah is protected, and through it the Sunnah (correct and straight path) remains clear.”¹¹¹ These statements make clear that confronting bid‘ah is not a temporary campaign but a continuous mission — an act of worship, preservation, and service to the Dīn.

To uphold the Salafī creed is to uphold the balance of the Ummah. The Prophet ﷺ said: “Whoever among you lives long will see many differences. So upon you is my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs after me; bite onto it with your molars, and beware of newly introduced matters, for every innovation is misguidance.”¹¹² This prophetic guidance is timeless: vigilance against innovation is as necessary today as it was in the earliest centuries. Every generation inherits the same two duties — to learn the truth with evidence and to refute its distortions with clarity. The Salaf did not view this as optional scholarship but as part of ḥifẓ ad-Dīn (preserving the religion).

Hence, the call to Salafīyyah is not a historical reference or identity label; it is an ongoing covenant of loyalty to revelation. The Qur’an warns: “And this is My path, which is straight, so follow it; and do not follow other ways, lest they separate you from His way.”¹¹³ This verse closes the door to bid‘ah entirely. The straight path (ṣīrāt al-mustaqīm) is singular — defined by revelation, walked by the Prophet ﷺ, and preserved by the Salaf. Every other way leads to deviation and separation. To maintain the unity of the Ummah upon the truth, the Salaf taught that one must “close every door that leads to bid‘ah,” a principle known as sadd adh-dharā’i’.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Fatāwā Ibn Bāz, 3/88 Similarly

¹¹¹ Sharḥ al-‘Aqīdah al-Wāsiṭiyyah, 1/102

¹¹² Abū Dāwūd, no. 4607; at-Tirmidhī, no. 2676

¹¹³ Surah al-An‘ām 6:153

¹¹⁴ The term sadd adh-dharā’i’ comes from two Arabic words: Sadd (سدّ) — to block, close, or prevent. Dhari‘ah (ذريعة) — a means, cause, or pathway leading to something.

The endurance of the Salafi creed, therefore, depends upon continuous teaching, clarification, and warning. Each generation must reaffirm that no innovation belongs to Islam and must educate the next in this principle with textual proof. The scholars of Ahl as-Sunnah consistently warned that complacency toward bid‘ah leads to its normalization, and normalization leads to its spread.

Ibn Taymiyyah رحمه الله wrote: “If the scholars remain silent about innovation out of fear or desire, the ignorant will think it is part of the religion, and thus the truth will disappear.”¹¹⁵ Silence, therefore, is itself a betrayal of ‘ilm and an opening for corruption.

In summary, upholding the Salafi creed requires perpetual awareness, instruction, and disavowal. Combating bid‘ah is not a phase but a continuing obligation — a legacy handed down unbroken from the Companions to the present day. The Salaf closed every path that led to innovation and maintained the Sunnah through knowledge, correct understaffing, caution, and unity upon evidence. Their legacy remains the same command: guard the creed, preserve the Sunnah, and never cease clarifying the truth until the Day of Judgment. Through this unyielding vigilance, the Ummah remains connected to its original purity — the unaltered Islam revealed to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, safeguarded by the Salaf, and entrusted to those who follow their path.

So linguistically it means: “Blocking the means (pathways) that lead to harm, sin, or corruption.” In the Shari‘ah, it refers to preventing permissible or apparently neutral actions when they serve as a means leading to a prohibited end — whether in belief, worship, speech, or conduct. Thus, *sadd adh-dharā‘i‘* means: “To close every door and pathway that may lead to what Allah and His Messenger ﷺ have forbidden.” This principle is directly rooted in the Qur’an’s divine method of blocking the approach to sin, not just the sin itself. For example: “Do not come near adultery.” (Surah al-Isrā’ 17:32). Allah did not only forbid *zinā* itself only but forbade even approaching it, meaning anything that leads to it. Or the Ayah: “Do not follow the footsteps of Shayṭān.” (Surah an-Nūr 24:21) Meaning: avoid the steps that lead to sin — Shayṭān guides gradually.

¹¹⁵ Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā, 28/231

Conclusion

Islam is already complete; nothing needs adding and nothing can be improved. Allah sealed this reality: “This day I have perfected for you your religion...”¹¹⁶

The Prophet ﷺ closed every door to alteration: “Every newly-invented matter is an innovation, and every innovation is misguidance,” and, “Whoever introduces into this matter of ours what is not from it—it is rejected.” These two foundations — perfection of the Dīn and rejection of additions — are the measure for the creed, ritual, and every slogan.

Unity is only unity upon evidence. Allah commands: “Hold firmly to the rope of Allah, all together, and be not divided”¹¹⁷ That rope is revelation as understood by the first generations; anything that competes with it fractures the Ummah: “Indeed, those who split up their religion and became sects — you have nothing to do with them.”¹¹⁸ Hence, Salafiyyah is not a label but an obligation to return to the Book, the Sunnah, and the way of the Companions — the only path that gathers hearts without compromising the truth.

Innovation is a source of fitnah, not reform. Allah warned: “Do not follow the footsteps of Shayṭān”¹¹⁹, and the Prophet ﷺ warned that differences would multiply and that safety lies in clinging to his Sunnah and the Sunnah of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs. Every innovation displaces an equivalent portion of Sunnah; it begins with desire, is justified by opinion, and ends in division. For that reason, opposing bid‘ah is part of amr bil-ma‘rūf wa-nahy ‘an al-munkar — a communal duty (farḍ kifāyah) that preserves the clarity of the Dīn.

The Salaf showed us how to protect that clarity: learn from people of Sunnah, warn against people of desires, and separate when needed for the sake of the truth — tahdhīr and hajr as mercy, not malice. ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Ibn Sīrīn, al-Fuḍayl, Mālik, Aḥmad (رضي الله عنهم أجمعين) — their narrations teach that companionship shapes creed, and that honoring the innovator harms Islam. Later scholars — Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Bāz, al-Fawzān, al-Albānī (رضي الله عنهم أجمعين) — only codified what the early imāms practiced: al-walā’ wal-barā’ upon the Sunnah.

Methodologically, the cure for innovation is disciplined submission to proof: istikhṛāj al-aḥkām min dalīl shar‘ī naqlī muṭlaq (deriving rulings only from clear textual evidence). “And whatever the Messenger gives you, take; whatever he forbids you,

¹¹⁶ Surah al-Mā'idah 5:3

¹¹⁷ Surah Āl 'Imrān 3:103

¹¹⁸ Surah al-An'ām 6:159

¹¹⁹ Surah al-Nūr 24:21

abstain.”¹²⁰ Reason serves revelation; it does not legislate beside it. What the Salaf did not consider religion cannot become religion after them. As Imām Mālik said, whatever was not Dīn then is not Dīn today.¹²¹

In the end, salvation is not in numbers but in fidelity: “This is My straight path, so follow it; and do not follow the other ways, lest they scatter you from His way”¹²²

Glad tidings to the strangers — those who repair what people corrupt of the Sunnah. May Allah make us of the group that remains manifest upon the truth until His command comes, that we meet Him having guarded His Dīn from addition, subtraction, and distortion — bi-idhni llāh.

¹²⁰ Surah al-Ḥashr 59:7

¹²¹ Al-I‘tiṣām by Imām ash-Shāṭibī 1/49 and others.

¹²² Surah al-An‘ām 6:153