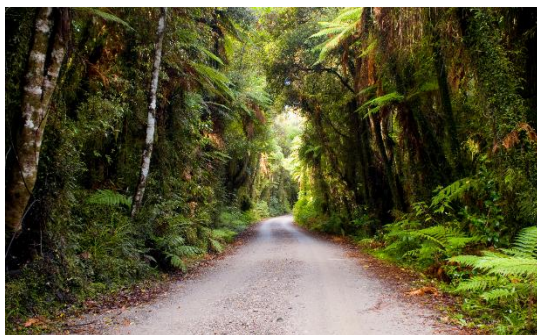


بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Ahlul Sunnah & the 72 Sects

The First Hadith:

Abu Amir al-Hawdhani said, "Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan (may Allah be pleased with him) stood among us and said, 'Beware! The Apostle of Allah ﷺ stood among us and said': 'Beware! The



People of the Book before (you) were split up into 72 sects, and this community will be split up into 73, seventy-two of them will go to Hell and one of them will go to Paradise, and it is the majority group (Jamā'ah).¹

The Second Hadith:

Awf ibn Malik reported that the Prophet ﷺ said, "The Jews split into 71 sects: one will enter Paradise and 70 will enter Hell. The Christians split into 72 sects: 71 will enter Hell and one will enter Paradise. By Him in Whose hand is my soul, my Ummah will split into 73 sects: one will enter Paradise and 72 will enter Hell.' Someone asked, 'O Messenger of Allah (Peace be upon him), who will they be?' He replied, 'The main body of the Muslims (al-Jama'ah).'¹ Awf ibn Malik is the only one who reported this Hadith, and its isnad is acceptable." And in another version of this Hadith the Prophet ﷺ

¹ Narrated by Abu Dawood in his Sunan 3/4580, Eng edition.

goes onto say that the saved sect, "...Are those who follow me and my Sahaba's path"²

Understanding the Division of the Ummah

The Prophet ﷺ warned that just as the previous nations (Jews and Christians) divided into multiple sects, the Muslim Ummah would also split into 73 groups. The crucial aspect of these ahadith is the emphasis on the saved group—"al-Jama'ah". And in one narration and "Those who follow me and my Sahabah's path" in another.

The division into sects is not unique to Islam. The Prophet ﷺ mentioned that the Jews were divided into 71 sects, the Christians into 72, and his Ummah would be divided into 73. This historical pattern illustrates a recurring trend where religious groups face challenges in maintaining unity, leading to the emergence of various factions.

- **Jews:** Historically, the Jewish community became divided due to differing interpretations of the Torah and their rejection of subsequent prophets. Over time, numerous sects emerged, such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and others.
- **Christians:** Similarly, the Christian community became divided into numerous sects, particularly after the Council of Nicaea (325 CE), with debates over the nature of 'Eesa (alaihi sallam), the trinity, and other theological issues. This resulted in sects like Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and various Protestant denominations.
- **Muslims:** The Prophet ﷺ foretold a similar division within the Muslim Ummah. This division occurred due to varying interpretations of Islamic teachings, differences in understanding the Quran and Sunnah, philosophy and rhetoric and political and social factors specifically after the death of the Prophet ﷺ, which led to the emergence of various groups and sects.

² Narrated by at-Tirmidhi in his Sunan vol. 2, pg. 89

The Meaning of "Sects" in the Hadith

The term “sect” (Arabic: "Firqa") refers to a group of people who share a particular ideology or belief system that deviates from the main body of Muslims. In the context of this hadith, it refers to groups that, while still claiming to be part of the Muslim Ummah, have deviated from the foundational teachings of Islam as practiced by the Prophet ﷺ and his Sahaba (companions).

The division mentioned is not limited to major theological differences but includes any deviation from the authentic teachings of Islam, such as:

- Theological innovations (e.g., belief in extreme interpretations of Allah’s attributes or the nature of the Prophet ﷺ).
- Ritual practices that were introduced after the time of the Prophet ﷺ, which were not practiced by the early generations of Muslims (Sahabah).
- Political divisions that led to the formation of different factions with distinct ideologies and practices.

Who is the Saved Sect?

The Prophet ﷺ did not leave a vague or ambiguous description of the sects. Instead, he made it clear that only one group would be saved—the Jama'ah. The key to understanding this division lies in understanding the following:

The Jamā’ah (Main Body)

The "Jamā’ah" in this context refers to the group that remains united upon the correct understanding of Islam. The saved group is not necessarily the majority in number, but rather those who follow the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions without deviation. This is the group that adheres strictly to the Quran, authentic Sunnah, and the methodology (Manhaj) of the early generations (Salaf).

The Jamā'ah, according to scholars, refers to those who:

- Follow the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah.
- Adhere to the methodology (Manhaj) of the Sahabah (the Companions).
- Avoid introducing new innovations (Bid'ah) into religious practice.

Different wordings of the hadith clarify that the saved sect consists of:

- The Jamā'ah (the united body of Muslims upon the truth).
- Those who follow the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions (Sahabah).

From these narrations, scholars have concluded that the Ahlus-Sunnah wal-Jamā'ah—those who adhere to the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ and the understanding of his Sahaba—are the saved sect. This implies that deviation occurs when people abandon the Quran, Sunnah, and the understanding of the early generations (Salaf).

Deviant Sects

The 72 sects are those who have deviated from this correct understanding, introducing innovations or corrupting the message of Islam. Some of these sects may have been influenced by political, cultural, or social factors. While some of them may still be within the fold of Islam, others may have crossed into kufr (disbelief), especially if they deny key tenets of faith, such as the oneness of Allah or the finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ.

The Fate of the Other 72 Sects

The narration states that 72 sects will enter Hellfire. However, scholars clarify that this does not necessarily mean they will remain there eternally. Many deviated groups are still within the fold of Islam, and their deviation may not amount to disbelief (kufr), but rather to misguidance (bid'ah, innovations). Only groups that commit acts of major disbelief (kufr) will remain in Hell permanently.

Imam Al-Tirmidhi and others have explained that this refers to those who introduce innovations into Islam that contradict the core beliefs and practices of the Prophet ﷺ and his Sahabah.

The Significance of the Ahadith in Understanding Sectarianism

These ahadith serve as a warning about the dangers of sectarianism within the Muslim Ummah. While division may occur over time, the underlying message is clear: unity based on the correct teachings of Islam is essential.

- **Unity in Belief and Practice:** The core message of Islam is clear, and the Prophet ﷺ left us with the Quran and Sunnah as a guide. Unity in belief and practice, based on the understanding of the early generations (the Salaf), is the key to avoiding division and preserving the integrity of the Ummah.
- **Caution against Innovations (Bid'ah):** The introduction of innovations into the religion is a major cause of division. The Prophet ﷺ warned against going beyond what he taught and advised sticking to what was revealed to him and practiced by his Companions.
- **The Importance of Following the Correct Path:** The saved sect is defined by its adherence to the Prophet's Sunnah ﷺ and the understanding of the Companions. This provides the criteria for distinguishing between those who are following the truth and those who have deviated.

The Importance of Holding onto the Sunnah

These ahadith emphasize the importance of following the Sunnah and the way of the Sahabah. The Prophet ﷺ did not leave the Ummah without guidance—he left behind the Quran and Sunnah, and these were his ﷺ Narrations. His Sahabah understood and implemented his teachings correctly and were the best. The correct path is:

- Adhering to the Quran and authentic Sunnah.
- Following the understanding of the Sahabah and the early generations of Muslims.
- Avoiding innovations (bid'ah) in religious matters.

Avoiding the Divisions

The Prophet ﷺ's warning urges Muslims to:

- Stick to the Sunnah: The primary means to avoid being part of a deviated sect is to adhere strictly to the authentic Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ and the understanding of his Companions.
- Focus on the essentials of faith: Avoid unnecessary theological disputes or innovations that divert from the main message of Islam.

The Role of Education and Purification

These ahadith serve as a warning against division and deviation. The solution to sectarianism lies in:

- Educating the Ummah on authentic Islam.
- Purifying beliefs and practices from innovation and misguidance.
- Cultivating a strong adherence to the way of the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions.
- Building a community (Jamā'ah) that upholds the truth collectively.

Conclusion

The division of the Muslim Ummah into 73 sects serves as both a warning and a guide. It is a crucial reminder of the importance of remaining steadfast upon the correct path—the path of the Prophet ﷺ and his Sahabah. While divisions are inevitable, the saved group is not defined by numbers but by adherence to the truth. While divisions may arise, the key to salvation and unity is to remain upon the straight path, free from innovations, and united in our commitment to the truth. This necessitates sincerity, knowledge, and action based on the Quran and Sunnah, according to the understanding of the early generations.

