

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

The Dangers of Speaking About The Qur'an Without Knowledge & Understanding

The Qur'an and ḥadīth repeatedly warn against claiming knowledge one does not have, especially in matters of Allah's Word and Religion. Allah commands the believers: "And do not pursue that of which you have no knowledge".¹



Ibn 'Abbās رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا explains: "This means do not say (anything) of which you have no knowledge... Allah forbids speaking without knowledge". Likewise Allah admonishes: "...And (that) you say about Allāh what you do not know"²

This severe warning is echoed by the Prophets Statement: "Whoever says about the Qur'an without knowledge, let him take his seat in the Fire." (narrated from Ibn 'Abbās, graded ḥasan).³

This is a severe warning without returning to the understanding of the Salaf, in particular tafsīr (i.e., Qur'an explains Qur'an, then Sunnah, then Ṣaḥābah).

¹ Surah Al-Isra 17:36

² Surah Al-A'raf 7:33

³ Narrated by Abū Dāwūd (3652), al-Tirmidhī (2950), Ibn Mājah (1246), al-Dārimī in his Sunan; authenticated by al-Tirmidhī (ḥasan), al-Nawawī, al-Ḥākim, al-Dhahabī, and Shaykh al-Albānī in Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan Abī Dāwūd and Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi' (no. 6084).

In another report the Prophet ﷺ said of one who interprets the Qur’ān by personal whim: “Whoever interprets the Qur’ān by his opinion, he has committed an error, even if he is correct.”⁴

The righteous salaf never practiced free interpretation separated/removed/divorced/unconnected from revelation. Their stance is: one must follow the Qur’ān, the Sunnah and authentic reports, not innovate meanings.

As Ibn Taymiyyah رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ stressed: “It is forbidden to interpret the Qur’ān by one’s own opinion”.⁵

Ibn al-Qayyim رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ said regarding speaking about Allāh without knowledge “one of the greatest prohibitions”⁶ — and cites Qur’an the previously mentined Ayah in Surah Al-A’raf 7:33.

Shaykh Ṣāliḥ al-Fawzān حَفِظَهُ اللَّهُ likewise warns that unguided interpretation leads to allying partners with Allāh (shirk) by inventing rulings.⁷

Shaykh al-Albānī رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ explains that the Sunnah exists “to explain what is in the Qur’ān”⁸ and that the Companions’ tafsīr is the guiding standard. He rebukes those who twist verses to support their own madhhab, calling such distortion “an extremely dangerous and mistaken path/matter” (ṭarīq khāṭi’) which is found in his critical works on manhaj, particularly in his audio series

⁴ Narrated by Abū Dāwūd (3652), al-Tirmidhī (2950), Ibn Mājah (1246); graded ḥasan by al-Tirmidhī, and authenticated by al-Albānī in Ṣaḥīḥ Sunan Abī Dāwūd and Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi’ (no. 6084).

⁵ Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr, in Majmū’ al-Fatāwā, vol. 13, pp. 361–365; see also al-Fatāwā al-Kubrā, vol. 6, p. 586, where he explicitly states that it is forbidden to interpret the Qur’ān based on one’s own opinion or desire.

⁶ I’lām al-Muwaqqi’īn, vol. 1, pp. 38–39; he states that speaking about Allāh without knowledge is “the foundation of disbelief and misguidance,” and ranks it among the gravest prohibitions.

⁷ Iṭḥāf al-Qārī bi-Ta’līqāt ‘alā Sharḥ al-Sunnah lil-Barbahārī, vol. 1, p. 172; also see al-Tafsīr wa Qawā’iduhu, p. 28, where he warns that interpreting the Qur’ān without knowledge leads to deviation and at times to shirk, because it involves attributing to Allah what He did not say.

⁸ Silsilat al-Hudā wa’l-Nūr, tape no. 725; see also Sharḥ al-‘Aqīdah al-Ṭaḥāwīyyah (al-Albānī’s notes), p. 78, where he states: “The Sunnah came as clarification (bayān) of the Qur’ān — in general, specific, absolute, and detailed forms — and whoever rejects the Sunnah has no understanding of the Qur’ān.”

and written responses regarding tafsīr without knowledge and bias-based interpretation.⁹

In short, the Salaf and later scholars uniformly held that tafsīr bi'r-ra'y (innovation by ones mere opinion/reasoning) is unlawful unless one first exhausts and understands The Qur'ān, and Sunnah. As Ibn Taymiyyah summed it up by stating: "Whoever interprets the Qur'ān by his own opinion has said what he has no knowledge of".¹⁰

Likewise, scholars like Shaykh Ibn Bāz رَحِمَهُ اللهُ and Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymīn رَحِمَهُ اللهُ counseled that it is better to say "I don't know" than to issue unqualified statements.

Examples of Misinterpretation Leading to Fitnah

History shows many examples where interpretation without knowledge caused deviation. In the earliest generations, extreme groups (like the Kharijites) twisted verses on disobedience to justify grave wrongdoing. In later times, **misguided individuals claiming** Qur'ānic justification for innovations have led masses astray. Contemporary extremist groups notably abuse verses of violence out of context: analysts have observed that even ISIS "sees itself as more faithful to scripture than other Muslims" yet its interpretation of Islam is wrong – in turn causing massive chaos. This example alone underline how anyone speaking on the Qur'an without knowledge – scholar or layperson – can sow discord and error, as the Prophet ﷺ warned.

Ahl as-Sunnah Methodology

The clear manhaj of Ahl as-Sunnah protects against this danger by insisting on sound sources and method.

⁹ Silsilat al-Hudā wa'l-Nūr – where he warns: "Some people explain the Qur'ān according to the view of their madhhab — not the other way around. This is a dangerous path (ṭarīq khāṭi'), because the Book of Allāh is to be followed, not manipulated to conform to personal views." He uses this to criticize sectarian or philosophical tafsīr, particularly from Mu'tazilah, Sufis, and Ḥizbiyyīn in modern times who read their ideology into the Book of Allah. Silsilat al-Hudā wa'l-Nūr, tape no. 725, Q&A segment.

¹⁰ Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr, in Majmū' al-Fatāwā, vol. 13, p. 244.

First, one begins with The Qur’ān and the mutawātir Sunnah as the foundational sources of guidance. The Prophet ﷺ was given the Qur’ān and “that which is similar to it”—namely the Sunnah—to explain its meanings. Therefore, whenever there appears to be a contradiction between a personal opinion and an authentic text, the text takes precedence without hesitation.

Second, when a verse has a clear explanation from a Companion or a reliable Ṭābi‘ī, that tafsīr is accepted without deviation. As Shaykh al-Albānī رحمه الله emphasized, after the Qur’ān and Sunnah, the tafsīr of the Ṣaḥābah is the most authoritative and binding source for understanding the divine speech.

Third, only in cases where there is no clear evidence from The Qur’ān, the Sunnah, or the Salaf’s tafsīr, may a qualified scholar engage in ijtihād—on the condition that he possesses mastery in Arabic, fiqh, and ḥadīth sciences, and that his interpretation strictly follows the principles of tafsīr and the linguistic and textual framework laid down by the early generations. Even then, such interpretations remain subordinate to what has preceded.

In this way, the Salafī methodology safeguards the Ummah (including non-Muslims) by ensuring that interpretations are rooted in knowledge, transmitted understanding, and divine intent—not in speculation, personal views, or desire. It is this rigorous framework that protects the religion from distortion, innovation, and the manifold harms that result from unrestrained exegesis.

In summary, do **not** speak of the Qur’ān or Sunnah without proper knowledge. The risk – spiritual destruction and communal and global fitnah – is great. By adhering to The Quran, Sunnah and the creed of the Salaf, one safeguards oneself against this grave danger.

May Allāh guide us to speak with knowledge and truth, and forgive us for our shortcomings, Ameen.

