



They say, ‘We are following what we found our fathers doing’ ¹

Imām al-Qurtubī

Translated by Aisha Bewley

Released by www.marifah.net 1428 H

“They say, ‘We are following what we found our fathers doing.’” ²

The strength of the expression of this *Ayah* would seem, on the surface, to challenge the whole matter of *taqlīd*, which is the acceptance of an inherited position without calling it into question, and there are other *Ayāt* which have the same import. This *Ayah* and the ones like it, however, are connected to what came before them. That is because Allāh informs us about the ignorance of the Arabs in judging by their superstitious customs concerning animals like *bahīra*, *sā’iba* and *wasīla*, using as evidence the fact that their fathers did that, and the command to abandon such customs was revealed by Allāh to His Messenger.

Some people, however, believe that this *Ayah* censures taking the position of *taqlīd* since Allāh Almighty censures the unbelievers for following their fathers in falsehood and imitating them in disbelief and disobedience. This is sound where falsehood is concerned. As for *taqlīd* in respect of the truth, it is one of the principles of the *dīn* and is a protection for the Muslims to which unlearned people who are unqualified to make rulings about matters of the *dīn* should have recourse. Scholars disagree about the permissibility of *taqlīd* in matters of *usūl* (basic principles), as will be discussed, but it is universally permitted in respect of secondary rulings.

According to scholars, the reality of *taqlīd* is to accept a position without evidence. Accordingly, someone who accepts the Prophet ﷺ without looking at his miracles would be a *muqallīd*. Someone who looks into them would not be. It is said that it is believing in the soundness of the *fatwās* of someone when the soundness of his position is not known. It is

¹ *Tafsīr al-Qurtubī*: Classical Commentary of the Holy Qur’ān (Volume 1), Dar al-Taḳwā (2003), pp. 424-426 – being an abridged translation of *al-Jāmi li-Abkām al-Qur’ān* (“The Compendium of Legal Rulings of the Qur’ān”). This translation can be ordered from [\[http://www.daraltaqwa.com/shopping/product_details.php?product_id=2453\]](http://www.daraltaqwa.com/shopping/product_details.php?product_id=2453)

² Qur’ān 2:170

derived from the *qilāda* of halter of the camel, which is when a rope is placed around its neck so that it can be led anywhere.

Taqlid is not a means to knowledge nor does it reach it, either in respect of basic principles or secondary rulings. That is the position of the majority of intelligent people and scholars, as opposed to what is related from the ignorant Hashwiyya and Tha`alibiyya who claim that *taqlid* is the sole means to recognize the truth and that it is mandatory, and that investigation and consideration are *haram*.

The obligation for the common person who is not able to deduce rulings from basic principles because he is not qualified to do so on account of his lack of knowledge of the *din* is to head for the person with the most knowledge in his time and his land and ask him about his problems and follow his *fatwa* since Allāh says,

“Ask the people of the Reminder if you do not know.”³

He uses *ijtihad* in finding the most knowledgeable of the people of his time by investigating until he is satisfied that he has found the man whom most people agree to be the most learned. A scholar must also imitate a scholar who has a similar standing to him in a case in which he does not find the solution through evidence and his own investigation. Qādī Abū Bakr and a group of established scholars believed that.

Ibn `Atiyya said, “The Community agrees that *taqlid* in respect of articles of faith is invalid.” Others, however, stated that there is disagreement about that, like Qādī Abū Bakr ibn `Arabī and Abū `Amr Uthmān Ibn Darbās. In *al-Intisār*, Ibn Darbās said, “Some people permit *taqlid* in respect of *tawhid*, but this is shown to be wrong by the words of Allāh: **‘We found our fathers following a religion,’**⁴ so He censured their imitation of their fathers and not following the Messenger, and this is just what the followers of sects do when they imitate their great men and do not follow the *din* of Muhammad ﷺ. It is an obligation for every responsible person to learn *tawhid* and proper understanding of it. That can only be obtained through the Book and Sunnah as we made clear. Allāh guides whomever He wills.”

Ibn Darbās also said,

Many of the people who follow sects say that those who cling to the Book and *Sunna* are imitators. This is an error on their part. This designation is more applicable to them and their scholars are less able since they turn to the position of their masters and great men in their deviation from the Book of Allāh and the Sunnah of his Messenger and the consensus of the Companions. So they are included among those whom Allāh censures when He says, **‘Our Lord, we obeyed our masters and great men...’**⁵

³ Qur’ān 16:43

⁴ Qur’ān 43:23

⁵ Qur’ān 33:67