

## **The Scientific Authority of the Ahl al-Bayt (as) in the Qur'ān**

Sayed Aqeel Hussaini<sup>1</sup>  
 Mohammad Nasser Vaezi<sup>2</sup>

(Received: April 07, 2025, Accepted: August 11, 2025)

### **Abstract**

The Holy Prophet Mohammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his purified progeny) is introduced in the Qur'ān as an interpreter, teacher, and explainer of the Qur'ānic verses and religious knowledge. After the Messenger of Allah, his Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet's purified family) have always been guides for the people as the most knowledgeable individuals regarding the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah. Like the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him and his purified progeny), they have explained the knowledge of the Qur'ān and religion to the people and, in reality, have been responsible for the leadership of Muslims. By referring to the Holy Qur'ān and authentic Shia and Sunni commentaries, one can clearly observe the scholarly position of the Holy Imams (peace be upon them), who, among all the companions, successors, scholars, and great figures of various Islamic schools of thought, held a special and unique position, and as a reliable authority and an endless source of knowledge, they have always been a point of reference for the people.

**Keywords:** Ahl al-Bayt, *'Ulil Amr*, *'Ilmul Kitāb*, *Ahl al-Dhikr*, *Ahl al-Qur'ān*, *Ahl al-Kitāb*.

---

1. PhD student in Ahl al-Bayt history, Imam Khomeini School, Al-Mustafa International University (corresponding author): seyedalihoseyni313110@gmail.com

2. Associate Professor of Islamic Studies; Faculty member at Imam Mobin International Research Center, Qom, Iran: vaezi@mobinac.ir



## Introduction

The esteemed Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him and his noble progeny) held scientific authority among Muslims during his time, and they referred to him as the designated scholarly reference from God. After the holy Prophet, his companions were regarded as those who had learned the teachings of the religion and the Qur'ān from him, but none of them could answer all the questions of the people like the Prophet, except for those who, like the Prophet, possessed endless knowledge and were affirmed by the Qur'ān.

By referring to many verses in the Qur'ān and based on the authentic narrations of both Shia and Sunni sources, it becomes clear that the scientific authority after the holy Prophet rests solely with his Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), and no one else. The explanation and clarification of the truths of the Holy Qur'ān and the prophetic tradition through Ahl al-Bayt is in a manner that prevents any misinterpretation and scientific disputes among Muslims. Establishing this authority is necessary firstly to identify the reference for explaining religious teachings and traditions after the passing of the Prophet, and secondly to prevent the distortion of religion due to personal interpretations.

According to some of the noble verses of the Holy Qur'ān, the infallible Imams (peace be upon them) are the scholarly reference in the interpretation of the Qur'ān and the Prophet's tradition, and referring to them plays a significant role in the correct understanding of religious propositions, fostering unity and peaceful coexistence among Muslims. Conversely, distancing from the Imams leads to incorrect interpretations of religious propositions, such as intercession, which today has resulted in dire consequences like war, bloodshed, and terrorism. The fundamental question, however, is: what evidence and verses from the Holy Qur'ān exist to prove the scientific authority of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them)? Extensive research has been conducted in this area, establishing the scientific authority of the Ahl al-Bayt through Qur'ānic verses, prophetic narrations, scientific and rational arguments, and historical evidence. The present study has struggled to substantiate the scientific authority of the Ahl al-Bayt by citing four verses from the Holy Qur'ān, drawing from Shia and Sunni interpretations and sources.

### 1. *Ulil Amr Verse*

In Surah Al-Nisa, God states: Believers, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. Should you dispute about anything refer it to Allah and the Messenger, if you believe in Allah and

the Last Day. That is better and the best interpretation (59).<sup>1</sup> Through this noble verse, one can argue for the scientific authority of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) in two ways:

### 1.1. The Instance of 'Ulil Amr (Those in Authority)

In the reputable sources of Sunni Islam, such as *Al-Jami' al-Bayan*, Vol. 5, p. 94; *Al-kashf wal-bayān an-Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, p. 334; *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-Tawīl*, Vol. 2, p. 80; *Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 5, p. 259; and *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Vol. 2, p. 176, prominent figures such as Abdullah ibn Abbas, Jabir ibn Abdullah Ansari, Abu Huraira, Mujahid, Suddi, Maymun ibn Mehran, and Ata', etc. have identified "the commanders of the sariyyahs<sup>2</sup> and Ulama<sup>3</sup> as the representatives of the 'Ulil Amr."

Regarding 'Ulil Amr verse, the great Sunni scholar Fakhr al-Razi, in his book *Al-Mafatih al-Ghayb*, Vol. 10, p. 113, states: "In this noble verse, God Almighty has definitively commanded obedience to 'Ulil Amr, and this is only valid if they are infallible from errors. Since it is not possible to identify an infallible Imam in our time, the intended meaning is the consensus of the people of *hall-o-'aqd*<sup>4</sup>...". Fakhr al-Razi has expressed this opinion based on his personal principle, as he considers consensus to be away from error and applies it to 'Ulil Amr, who are per se infallible, while error is possible for each individual from whom the consensus is formed. Therefore, consensus cannot represent 'Ulil Amr who intrinsically infallible.

Of course, according to Shia belief, the only representatives of 'Ulil Amr are the Ahl al-Bayt of the Prophet, whose obedience is obligatory just like the obedience to the Prophet himself after him. However, when we examine the views of Sunni scholars, it is clear that Imam Ali (peace be upon him) is undoubtedly one of 'Ulil Amr; because during the time of the Messenger of Allah, he was one of the commanders in sariyyahs (Waqidi, 1987, pp.

1. يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولَى الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ فَإِنْ تَنَازَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ فَرُدُّوهُ إِلَى اللَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَحْسَنُ تَأْوِيلًا.

2. Sariyyah, also called Ba'th were the wars fought by Muslims during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that were carried out without the presence of the Prophet himself and under the command of one of his companions.

3. Ulama, also spelled ulema, are religious scholars in Islam who are well-versed in Islamic doctrine and law. They are regarded as the guardians and interpreters of religious knowledge and are educated in religious schools known as madrasas. They are recognized as having specialist knowledge of Islamic sacred law and theology.

4. Control authority management; the people of hall-o-'aqd are those trusted by the common people, and are in charge of the work. In Islamic terminology, the term 'the people of hall-o-'aqd' refers to 'a group of people recognized as knowledgeable and capable, often involved in significant decision-making, particularly in relation to selecting a leader or caliph in Islamic governance'. Unlike Shia beliefs that emphasize a divinely appointed leader, Sunni tradition values the decision of "ahl al-hall wal-'aqd" (the people of resolution and contract) in choosing a leader.

502, 984,1079) and after the Prophet, he is considered one of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. At the same time, all prominent Shia and Sunni scholars acknowledge that Ali (peace be upon him) was the most knowledgeable person regarding the prophetic tradition. (Qurtubi, 1994, p. 206; Tabari, 1994, p. 141; Dhahabi, 1996, p. 628; Shirazi, 1987, p. 12, 42)

Ali (peace be upon him) held the command of at least three *sariyyahs* during the time of the holy Prophet and is also counted among those in authority. Mohammad Ravas Qal'ehji, a Hanafi Salafi jurist, writes in his book "*Mawsu'ah Fiqh Ali ibn Abi Talib*," p. 5: "The *fiqh* (jurisprudence) of the Salaf is derived from the *fiqh* of the *Sahabah* ( the Companions), and the *fiqh* of the *Sahabah* originates from the *fiqh* of the Imams of *Fatwā* [especially] their distinguished figures in *fiqh*, who are Umar ibn al-Khattab, Ali ibn Abi Talib, Abdullah ibn Abbas, Abdullah ibn Umar, Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, Zayd ibn Thabit, and Aishah, may Allah be pleased with them all; And, by the testimony of the holy Prophet, the knowledge of Ali ibn Abi Talib, may Allah be pleased with him, is greater than all of these."

Considering the statements of the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah and their interpretations regarding the '*Ulil Amr*, Imam Ali (peace be upon him) is among the '*Ulil Amr*, as he was both a commander and a scholar.

Regarding this matter, Sheikh Mufid writes in his book *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* al-Majid, p. 156, "The Commander of the Faithful [Ali] (peace be upon him) is undoubtedly among the '*Ulil Amr* because there are various opinions regarding the meaning of '*Ulil Amr*: first, that '*Ulil Amr* are the scholars; second, they are the commanders of *sariyyahs* [military expeditions]; and third, they are the leaders of the people. All these attributes were present in the Commander of the Faithful [that is, Imam Ali]. By consensus, he was among the scholars [*faqih/sfuqahā*] and, without any disagreement, was one of the most distinguished commanders of the Prophet's army, and by the agreement of all scholars after the holy Prophet of Islam, he held the leadership and imamate of the Muslims for a period of time. Therefore, it is necessary that the specific and defined instance [referent] of the verse regarding '*Ulil Amr* be based on what has been said, namely, Ali - the Commander of the Faithful.

### **1.2. Authority for Resolving Disputes after the Demise of the Prophet**

The Qur'ān states in the second part of '*Ulil Amr* Verse: ...then whenever you have a dispute or disagreement, refer it to Allah and His Messenger. The Sunni interpreters in *Al-Kashf wal-Bayān*, vol. 3, p. 336; *Anwār al-Tanzīl wa Asrār al-T'awīl*, vol. 2, p. 80; *Jāmi'a al-Bayān*, vol. 5, p. 96; *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, vol. 2, p. 178; *Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, p. 114; and *Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 5, p. 261, regarding the community's

reference after the Messenger for resolving legal and social issues have said: "In times of dispute and disagreement about something, refer it to Allah, that is, to His Book, and refer to the Messenger if he is alive; if Allah has taken him to Himself, then refer to his Sunnah."<sup>1</sup>

Qurtubi (1994), a prominent Sunni interpreter of the Qur'ān who lived in the 7th century, cites the second part of a verse as evidence for the authority of the 'Uli al-Amr (those in authority), in his book "*Al-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'ān*," vol. 5, p. 260, stating: "In times of disagreement, one must refer to the Book of God and the Sunnah of the Prophet. No one other than the scholars [*'Ulamā*] knows how to resolve disputes according to the Qur'ān and Sunnah, and this indicates the necessity of asking scholars and accepting their *fatwās* [religious rulings]." Nonetheless, the most important question is: Who was the most knowledgeable and learned person regarding the Prophet's Sunnah? The answer to this question can be found in the words of prominent Sunni figures. According to different sources (*Tarikh al-Khulafa* by Suyuti, p. 171; *Yanabi' al-Mawadda* by Qunduzi, p. 343; *Al-Isti'ab* by Qurtubi, in the middle of the biography of Ali, vol. 3, p. 1104, hadith 1855 [with the same meaning]; *Tarikh Madinah Dimashq* by Ibn Asakir in the biography of Imam Ali, vol. 3, hadith 1079, p. 48; *Ansāb al-Ashraf* by Baladhuri, in hadith 86 from the biography of Ali from, vol. 2, p. 124, 1st edition, Beirut), it is narrated from Aishah that: "The most knowledgeable person regarding the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah is Ali ibn Abi Talib."

Moreover, Anas ibn Malik narrates from the holy Prophet that he said: "There is no prophet except that he has a counterpart from his Ummah (nation), and in my Ummah, Ali is my counterpart."<sup>2</sup> (Qurtubi, 1994, p. 206; Shirazi, 1987, p. 42; Tabari, 1994, pp. 141, 143, 164; Dhahabi, 1996, p. 628. 18.) In another hadith, he says that the Messenger of Allah was asked: "From whom should we learn knowledge after you?" the holy Prophet replied: "From Ali and Salman."<sup>3</sup> (Sahmi, 1998, p. 29; Shushtari, 1997, p. 486; Dhahabi, 1960, p. 46.)

Based on the statements of prominent Sunni figures, it can be concluded that, according to the Sunni understanding of the meaning and embodiment of 'Uli al-Amr, Amir al-Mu'minin Ali ibn Abi Talib (peace be upon him) is the most deserving person to be a reference for resolving disputes among Muslims after the Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him and his noble progeny). Furthermore, it is acknowledged by Sunni scholars and

1. «فإن تنازعتم في شئ فردوه إلى الله أي إلى كتابه والرد إلى الرسول إن كان حياً فإن قبضه الله إليه فالرد إلى سنته».

2. ما من نبي إلا وله نظير من أمته وفي أمتي علي نظيري.

3. عمّن تكتب العلم بعدك؟ قال: عن علي و سلمان.

prominent figures (Dhahabi, 1996; Haythami, 1992; Ibn Abi al-Hadid, 1999; Ibn Asakir, 1995; Ibn Sa'd, 1983; Ibn Taymiyyah, 1995; Irbali, 2002; Jahiz, 1987; Mohammad, 1993; Shahrastani, 1985) who have praised some of the Shia Imams, such as Imam Sajjad, Imam Bāqir, and Imam Sadiq (peace be upon them), and have introduced these Imams as the most knowledgeable people of their time. For instance, Abu Hanifa, after having a debate with Imam Ṣādiq (peace be upon him), wherein the Imam answered all his questions based on the opinions of all the jurists, said about him: "Indeed, the most knowledgeable of people is the one who is most aware of the differences among people."<sup>1</sup>(Sharqawi, 2005, p. 49; Mohammad, 1993, p. 29)

Ibn Shihab Zuhri, one of the prominent and trusted scholars and jurists of the Sunnis, as cited in the book *Tadhkīrah al-Hufāz* by Dhahabi (2007) states: "I have not seen a jurist more knowledgeable than Ali ibn al-Hussein."<sup>2</sup>(p.75) Additionally, Shak'a (2007), one of the contemporary Sunni thinkers says: "Imam Ṣādiq is the Imam of the Shiites in particular and the Imam of all Muslims in general, and he is not only the Imam for the Shiites, since on various occasions Sunni scholars such as Sufyan al-Thawri, Abu Hanifa, and Sufyan ibn 'Uyaynah have narrated from him, and this narrating [of narrations] is natural; because he is the Imam of all Muslims and is not the Imam for a specific sect." (p. 398)

Abdul Rahman Al-Sharqawi (1983), a contemporary Egyptian writer and thinker says in his book *Al-'A'imma al-Fiqh al-Tis'ah* "Imam Ṣādiq (a) trained hundreds of Sunni fuqaha [jurists] who came to him from different cities, who narrated from him and taught his views on fiqh [jurisprudence] to the people, and these were other than the Shiite fuqaha. Imam Ja'far Al-Sadiq passed away while Imam Malik bin Anas was his student, and Nu'man Abu Hanifa narrated from him and learned from him, and he was his student for two years, and he said in this regard: "If it were not for those two years, Nu'man would have perished." (p.51)

Consequently, bearing in mind the words of Sunni scholars, outstanding figures, and thinkers, and considering that according to them, *'Ulil Amr* (the people of authority) are the scholars who refer to the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him) in times of disagreement and know how to use this Sunnah, we can conclude that the Commander of the Faithful, Ali ibn Abi Talib (peace be upon him) and at least some of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) would also be examples of *'Ulil Amr* in the noble verse of *'Ulil Amr*.



<sup>1</sup> إن أعلم الناس أعلمهم باختلاف الناس.

<sup>2</sup> ما رأيت أفقه من علي بن الحسين.

## 2. *Kūnū Ma'al-Ṣādiqīn* Verse<sup>1</sup>

In Surah Tawbah, verse 119, Allah says: “O you who have believed, be mindful of God and accompany the truthful.”<sup>2</sup> To understand who *sadiqeen* (the truthful) are, first, *sidq* (truthfulness) should be defined. *Ṣidq* means honesty and is the opposite of *kidhb* (lying); however, this term has a broader meaning and is also applied to intention and action. *Ṣādiq* (a truthful person) is “one whose intentions and actions align with reality and truth, fulfilling his or her obligations”. (Ragheb Isfahani, 1990, p. 479; Turayhi Fakhr al-Din, 1996, p. 199) In the interpretation of the above verse, commentators have also pointed out that “*ṣidq* here refers to honesty and integrity in speech, intention, and action”. (Zamakhshari, 1994, p. 320) in a way that “a person's actions confirm their words, and it is not the case that they speak or hold beliefs contrary to their actions”. (Tha'labi Nishaburi, 2000, p. 109; Baydawi, 1996, p. 207; Tabari, 2001, p. 45; Alusi, 1995, p. 43) Regarding the term *ṣādiq*, Tabarsi (1993) states: “... Be on the path of those who uphold truth in their speech and behavior, then associate with them.” (p. 122)

### 2.1. *Ṣādiqīn* and Scientific Authority

By examining the lexicons and the words of Qur'ānic commentators, we can conclude that *sidq* is the alignment of speech, belief, and action with reality. In ‘*Kūnū Ma'al-Ṣādiqīn* verse’, Allah commands us to accompany and associate with *ṣādiqīn*. Fakhr al-Razi states in his book *Mafātih al-Ghayb*, Vol. 16, p. 167: “Being with *sadiqeen* means to follow the way of *sadiqeen*.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, we are obliged by the Qur'ān to be with those who in their speech, thoughts, and actions, act correctly in accordance with reality and to walk in accordance with their method and doctrine. This implies a scientific authority that we must follow based on the speech, thoughts, and actions of *sadiqeen*, guiding our life's path, and if we stray, make mistakes, or deviate, a *ṣādiq* (truthful) person will prevent us from error.

### 2.2. The Exemplars of *Ṣādiqīn*

The question that now arises is: Who are the true examples of the *sadiqeen*, so that we can determine the path of our lives based on their methods, beliefs, and traditions? In the following, we examine the exemplars of *sadiqeen* based on the hadiths and sayings of the great scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah.

<sup>1</sup> كُونُوا مَعَ الصَّادِقِينَ.

<sup>2</sup> يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَكُونُوا مَعَ الصَّادِقِينَ.

<sup>3</sup> كونوا مع الصادقين يعني كونوا على طريقة الصادقين.

1. Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti in his book *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, Vol. 3, p. 290, quotes Imam Bāqir (peace be upon him) as saying: “Be with *ṣādiqīn* [the truthful],” and he said: “With Ali ibn Abi Talib.”<sup>1</sup>

2. Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzi in his book *Tadhkirat al-Khawās*, p. 41, states: “The scholars of *Tafsīr* (exegesis) have said that the words of Allah, which state: “Be with *ṣādiqīn*,” mean to be alongside Ali and his household.”<sup>2</sup>

3. Hakim Haskani also mentions in his book *Shawāhid al-Tanzīl*, Vol. 1, p. 345, from Anas ibn Malik and Abdullah ibn Umar that: “Fear Allah,” he said: “Allah commands all the companions of Mohammad to fear Him and to be with *ṣādiqīn*, meaning to be with Mohammad and his household.”<sup>3</sup> According to this noble verse, all Muslims are obligated to follow *ṣādiqīn* and to walk in their path and doctrine. The primary and complete exemplars of *sādiqeen* are the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), whose methods and conduct in all religious matters serve as a model for others, and the rest, including the companions of the holy Prophet (peace be upon him and his noble progeny), should follow them.

### 3. 'Imol Kitāb Verse

In verse 43 of Surah Ra'd, God addresses the noble Prophet (pbuh), saying: Those who disbelieve say: 'You are not a Messenger. 'Say: 'Allah is a sufficient witness between me and you, and whosoever possess knowledge of the Book. '<sup>4</sup> The Holy Qur'ān articulates the laws and teachings of the religion for the people and is considered the first and most reliable source of knowledge for all Muslims. The Qur'ān outlines the general issues of religion, and to understand it accurately, a commentator and explainer is needed. Therefore, a reference is necessary to convey the true intent of the Qur'ān to others. This verse clearly testifies that among Muslims, there exists an individual who is knowledgeable of all the truths of the Qur'ān, indicating his scholarly authority. Now, we must investigate who this person is that possesses *'Imol Kitāb*; that is, all the knowledge of the Book. This knowledge is not merely knowledge of the apparent meanings of the Qur'ān but encompasses both the apparent and the hidden meanings, as well as all the depths of the Book of God. Knowledge of the apparent meanings of the Qur'ān is accessible to anyone and does not necessarily lead to certainty. However, the testimony of someone who possesses knowledge of the Book is a sign of his truthfulness and indicator

<sup>1</sup> كونوا مع الصادقين» ، قال : «مع علي بن ابي طالب».

<sup>2</sup> قوله تعالى: (وكونوا مع الصادقين)، قال علماء التفسير معناه كونوا مع علي وأهل بيته.

<sup>3</sup> اتقوا الله قال : أمر الله أصحاب محمد بأجمعهم أن يخافوا الله ثم قال لهم : وكونوا مع الصادقين، يعني محمداً و أهل

بيته.

<sup>4</sup> وَيَقُولُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَسْتَ مُرْسَلًا قُلْ كَفَىٰ بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكُمْ وَمَنْ عِنْدَهُ عِلْمُ الْكِتَابِ.

of his certain and definitive knowledge. Therefore, the one who holds all the knowledge of the Qur'ān is considered the most deserving reference for religious sciences. The important and fundamental question is: who is this person enjoying knowledge of the Book? In this regard, Abu Umar ibn Zazan narrates from Mohammad ibn Hanafiyyah: "The one who has knowledge of the Book is Ali ibn Abi Talib."<sup>1</sup> (Tha'labi Nishaburi, 2000, p. 304; Qurtubi, 1985, p. 336; Haskani, 1989, p. 401)

Moreover, Hakim Haskani, through his chain of narration from Abu Sa'id al-Khudri in Shawahid al-Tanzeel, Vol. 1, p. 400, has reported that: "I asked the Messenger of God about the saying of the Almighty God, i.e., '... and whoever has knowledge of the Book'. The Prophet said: He is my brother Ali ibn Abi Talib."

Abdullah ibn Aṭā says: "I was sitting with Imam Bāqir (peace be upon him) when suddenly the son of Abdullah ibn Salam passed in front of the Imam. I said, "May I be thy ransom; is he the son of the one who has *'Ilmol Kitāb* (knowledge of the Book)?" The Imam replied: "No, but your master Ali ibn Abi Talib is the possessor of *'Ilmol Kitāb*." (Tha'labi Nishaburi, 2000, p. 302; Qurtubi, 1985, p. 336; Haskani, 1989, p. 402.)

Among those whom some Sunni commentators have introduced as the possessor of *'Ilmol Kitāb* is Abdullah ibn Salam, a view that Imam Bāqir (peace be upon him) rejects. Additionally, when asked by Sa'id ibn Jubayr: "Is Abdullah ibn Salam the one who has the knowledge of the Book?" he replied: "How can Abdullah ibn Salam be, while Surah Ra'd is Meccan and Abdullah ibn Salam embraced Islam in Medina?" (Tha'labi Nishaburi, 2000, p. 302; Qurtubi, 1985, p. 336)

Although some prominent figures among the Sunnis have attempted to diminish the scholarly status of Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (peace be upon him) and portray others as more knowledgeable than him, historical evidence shows that Ali was the most knowledgeable person after the Prophet. For instance, the caliphs themselves would refer to Imam Ali for their scholarly problems; as Malik ibn Anas narrates: "A Jewish man entered the mosque and asked the people where the successor of the Messenger of God was. The people pointed him to Abu Bakr. The Jewish man said, "I want to ask you things that only the Prophet and his successor know." Abu Bakr replied, "Ask whatever you wish." The Jewish man asked, "Tell me, what is it that God does not have, and what is it that is not with God, and what does God not know?" Abu Bakr said, "O Jew, these are the questions of heretics." Then Abu Bakr and the other Muslims attacked the Jew. Ibn-e Abbas said, "You did not treat this Jew fairly." Abu Bakr responded, "Did you not hear

<sup>1</sup>. و من عنده علم الكتاب؛ قال : هو علي بن أبي طالب.

what he said?!" Ibn Abbas replied, "If you know the answer to his question, then say it; otherwise, go with him to Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) so he can answer it, for I heard from the Messenger of God that he said: " 'O Allah, guide his (Ali's) heart to the truth and keep his tongue steadfast in this way." Abu Bakr, along with his companions, went to Ali's house and addressed him, saying: " 'O Abu al-Hasan, this Jew is asking me questions that are from the words of heretics." Ali said, "What do you say, O Jew?" ... The Imam answered his questions, and afterward, the Muslims were pleased and addressed the Imam, saying: "O Reliever of Distresses!"<sup>1</sup>" (Mazandarani, 2000, p. 257; Sharqawi, 1983, pp. 88-89.)

It is also narrated from Umar ibn al-Khattab that he repeatedly said: "If it were not for Ali, Umar would have perished."<sup>2</sup> (Sibt ibn al-Jawzi. 2007, p. 198; Tabari, 1994, p. 141; Sharqawi, 1983, p. 107). It has been reported that one day, Umar ibn al-Khattab gathered the companions of the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) and consulted with them on a matter, and Imam Ali (peace be upon him) was among them. Umar said to Ali: "You should also share your opinion; for you are the most knowledgeable and the best among them (i.e., the companions)." (Shirazi, 1987, p. 42.)

According to hadiths narrated by Aisha and Salman al-Farsi, Ali ibn Abi Talib (peace be upon him) is identified as the most knowledgeable person about the prophetic tradition. (Qurtubi, 1994, p. 206; Dhahabi, 1996, p. 628; Ganji Shafi'i, p. 332.) Ganji Shafi'i, a trusted figure among Sunni scholars, states in his book *Kifayat al-Talib*:

"Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and other companions of the Prophet always consulted Ali regarding religious rulings, and due to their acknowledgment of his knowledge and the breadth of his virtue and status in terms of his superior intellect and sound judgment, they accepted his opinion in rejecting or accepting rulings." (p. 223)



<sup>1</sup> يَا مُفْرَجَ الْكُرُوبِ.  
<sup>2</sup> لَوْلَا عَلِيٌّ لَهْلَكَ عَمْرٌ.

As an example, we can refer to a ruling case wherein Umar issued a ruling to stone a pregnant woman who had committed adultery. Imam Ali said: "The ruling cannot be executed until she gives birth." Umar accepted the Imam's words and said: "If it were not for Ali, Umar would have perished." (Ganji Shafi'i, p. 227.) indubitably, in a context where the caliphs and companions acknowledge that Ali ibn Abi Talib (peace be upon him) is the most knowledgeable of the companions and refer to him in their scholarly difficulties, there is no room left for some Sunni scholars to express opinions claiming others are more knowledgeable. Besides, 'Madinat al-'Ilm Hadith' [the hadith of the City of Knowledge], in which the Prophet introduces Ali as the gate of the city of prophetic knowledge, has been narrated in reputable Sunni books such as *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, *Umdat al-Bari*, *Usd al-Ghābah*, *Tārikh-e Baghdad*, *Al-Mustadrak*, and others, which have confirmed its authenticity.

Considering the aforementioned points and the fact that Imam Ali, the Commander of the Faithful, is the one who possesses the knowledge of the entire Qur'ān, both its apparent and hidden meanings and secrets, no doubt remains that he is the reference for conveying the teachings of the Qur'ān and religion.

#### 4. *Ahl al-Dhikr* Verse

God states in two places in the Qur'ān, namely in verse 43 of Surah Nahl and verse 7 of Surah Anbīyā: "So ask *Ahl al-Dhikr* [the people of remembrance] if you do not know."<sup>1</sup> This means if you do not know something, ask *Ahl al-Dhikr* (the people of knowledge) and scholars. According to this verse, God refers people to those who are knowledgeable and learned in matters they do not know.

Tabarsi (1993) states "Here, knowledge is called *dhikr* (remembrance/mention) because *dhikr* comes into existence with knowledge, and *dhikr* is like a cause that leads to knowledge. Therefore, it is better to be placed in the position of knowledge and to inform about its meaning." (p. 557)

<sup>1</sup> فَاسْتَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ.



Although *Ahl al-Dhikr* verse was revealed concerning the prophets, and they are of the human race and people, by disregarding the specific context, the verse can be generalized to mean that whenever a person does not know something, they should refer to the scholars of that field. About this, Alusi, in his book *Rūḥ al-Ma'āni*, Vol. 7, p. 388, says: "The beginning of the parenthetical clause with 'fa' (meaning so/then in Arabic) is among the cases that the author of *al-Tashīl* and others have pointed out, and what they have said about the impermissibility of beginning the first word of a sentence with 'fa' is not correct. The verse [Actually] is in the position of obligating and reproaching the ignorant, whose best interest lies in asking the scholars and accepting it, not denying it, because denying is not appropriate for their ignorance. Therefore, they must accept the words of the scholar, and *Ahl al-Dhikr* is not limited to the people of the Torah and the Gospel, but also includes the Prophet [Mohammad] and his companions." Yet, there exists a question of who the embodiment of *Ahl al-Dhikr* is.

#### 4.1. Ahl al-Bayt

Tabari, in his Tafsīr book, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Vol. 17, p. 5, narrates from Jaber ibn Yazid Jo'fi through his chain of transmission: "When *Ahl al-Dhikr* verse was revealed, Ali said: 'We are *Ahl al-Dhikr*...'"<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, interpreting the verse, Imam Bāqir (peace be upon him) states: "We [the Ahl al-Bayt] are *Ahl al-Dhikr*."<sup>2</sup> (Tabari, 2001, p.75; Tha'labi Nishaburi, 2000, p. 207; Haskani, 1989, p. 432; Tafsīr al-Qur'ān, Vol. 4, p. 492.) Ibn Kathir, in his Tafsīr *al-Qur'ān al-Azīm*, Vol. 4, p. 492, explains this *hadīth* by saying: "What Abu Ja'far [Imam Bāqir] means is that this Ummah is *Ahl al-Dhikr* because the Ummah of Islam is more knowledgeable than all previous nations, and the scholars of the Ahl al-Bayt of the Messenger of God are among the best scholars since they follow the correct tradition, like Ali, Ibn-e Abbas, Hasan, Husayn, Mohammad al-Hanafiyah, Ali ibn al-Husayn Zain al-'Abidin, Abu Ja'far al-Bāqir, and his son Ja'far, and the like who adhere to the firm rope and the straight path."

Sheikh Mufid also narrates in his book *Al-Irshad*, p. 385, from Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, a trustworthy scholar among the Ahl al-Sunnah, who said: "I asked Mohammad ibn Muqatil about *Ahl al-Dhikr*, and he said it refers to all scholars.

<sup>1</sup> لما نزلت فأسئلوا أهل الذكر إن كنتم لا تعلمون، قال علي نحن أهل الذكر.

<sup>2</sup> نحن أهل الذكر.

I conveyed this statement to Abu Zar'ah, and he was astonished by it. At the same time, I also narrated the *ḥadīth* of Yahya ibn Abd al-Hamid from Imam Bāqir, who said: 'We are *Ahl al-Dhikr*, and Abu Zar'ah said: Mohammad ibn Ali [Imam Bāqir] has spoken the truth. Indeed, they are the people of knowledge, and I swear by my soul that Abu Ja'far [Imam Bāqir] is one of the greatest scholars. He has narrated the news of tawhid (monotheism) and the prophets, and people follow his way and conduct, and rely on his statements regarding the rulings of Hajj, which he narrated from the Messenger of God. People have written a commentary on the Qur'ān from his speeches. Both Shia and Sunni have narrated from him, and he has debated with scholars of various sects, and many people have memorized a great deal of theological knowledge from him."

Hakim Haskani, in *Shawahid al-Tanzeel*, Vol. 1, p. 432, narrates with a chain of transmission from Suddi, and he from Harith, that: "I asked Ali about this verse, he said: 'By God, we are *Ahl al-Dhikr*, we are the *Ahl al-'Ilm* (People of Knowledge), and we are the source of interpretation (*ta'wil*) and revelation (*tanzīl*). And I [that is Harith] heard the Messenger of God saying: 'I am the city of knowledge, and Ali is its gate. So, whoever desires knowledge, let him come to it through its gate.'"<sup>1</sup>

According to the aforementioned narrations, therefore, since the *Ahl al-Bayt* (peace be upon them) are the source of knowledge and the knowledge of the Qur'ān is with them, whoever intends to understand true knowledge must refer to the *Ahl al-Bayt*. And this means the scholarly and scientific authority (*marja'īyyat-e 'ilmī*) of the *Ahl al-Bayt*.

#### 4.2. *Ahl al-Qur'ān*

According to Maybudi (1992) and Alusi (1995), *Ahl al-Qur'ān* or the people of the Qur'ān is "another definition or equivalent of *Ahl al-Dhikr*". (p.389; p.388) In this regard, Tha'labi Nishaburi (2000) narrates from Zayd: "By using the word *Dhikr* God intended the Qur'ān; that is, ask the knowledgeable believers who are the people of the Qur'ān." (p. 270.). Also, Alusi (1995) after investigation and examination in the related literature, concludes that *Ahl al-Dhikr* are *Ahl al-Qur'ān*. (p. 388.)

<sup>1</sup> سألت علياً عن هذه الآية «فسألوا أهل الذكر» فقال: والله إنا لنحن أهل الذكر، نحن أهل العلم، ونحن معدن التأويل والتنزيل، ولقد سمعت رسول الله يقول: أنا مدينة العلم وعلى بابها، فمن أراد العلم فليأتها من بابها.



Mohammad ibn Muslim also narrates from Imam Bāqir (peace be upon him) that he said: “*Al-Dhikr* is the Qur’ān, and the family of the Messenger of God [Ahl al-Bayt] are *Ahl al-Dhikr*, since they are the ones to be questioned.” (Bahrani, 1995, p. 452; Saffar, 2002, p. 42.)<sup>1</sup>

According to some narrations in Sunni sources, the meaning of the people of *Ahl al-Dhikr* is Imam Ali (peace be upon him), from whom people should ask their questions about religious matters. Based on some other narrations, the meaning of *Ahl al-Dhikr* is the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them), and the following of them by people and scholars of various Islamic schools of thought, and the narration of their traditions in religious rulings, and acting according to their way of life can also confirm this matter.

Based on this interpretation, the scholarly authority of the Ahl al-Bayt is clear, but even if we consider the meaning of *Ahl al-Dhikr* to be Ahl al-Qur’ān and scholars from *Ahl al-Qur’ān*, then again, Amir al-Mu'minin Ali and the Ahl al-Bayt are superior to others because the knowledge of the Qur’ān is with them, and they are the best and most knowledgeable scholars of the Qur’ān and religious matters. Therefore, they are the most deserving individuals to answer and explain religious issues.

#### 4.3. *Ahl al-Kitāb*

Another example of *Ahl al-Dhikr* in this noble verse are the believers from *Ahl al-Kitāb* (the People of the Book), from whom questions should be asked about the human and male nature of the prophets of God. (Qurtubi, 1985; Tabarsi, 1993) This interpretation has been narrated by some Sunni sources from Ibn Abbas and Mujahid, but if we take the Qur’ān itself as the criterion, this interpretation seems correct that this question from the People of the Book was because of their knowledge of their own heavenly books. While the polytheists of Mecca did not have such knowledge, and it was only used in one specific case, the content of the verse is general. This general content is referring to a scholar in matters that a person is ignorant of, and based on the aforementioned hadiths and careful consideration of the relevant verses, the main and prominent example of these scholars is the Ahl al-Bayt.



<sup>1</sup> الذكر القرآن و آل رسول الله أهل الذكر وهم مسئولون.

## Conclusion

From the totality of the mentioned four noble verses and the interpretations provided for them, it can be concluded that whether we consider *'Ulil Amr* to mean those in authority [ even to mean military commanders] or scholars, the best and most prominent example of this is Amir al-Mu'minin Ali ibn Abi Talib (peace be upon him). He was the most reliable individual for resolving religious disputes among people, and after him, it is acknowledged by the great figures and leaders of Sunni sects that the infallible Imams (as) from the progeny of the Prophet (pbuh) were the most knowledgeable individuals of their time in religious matters. Regarding the companionship with *Ṣādiqīn* (the truthful), those who are followed must not err in their words and actions. These individuals can only be the Messenger of God, Amir al-Mu'minin Ali, Fatimah al-Zahra, Hasan and Husayn (peace be upon them), as only they are infallible from error and sin. Taḥīr Ayah (the Verse of Purification) and Hadith Kisá<sup>1</sup> support this subject. (Sahih Muslim, p. 1049 (single Volume); Tabari, ١٩٩٤, p.135; Hakim Nishaburi, 2000, p. 133; Heravi Qari, 2000, p. 3062; Tirmidhi, 1998, p. 1079; Qunduzi, 1997, p. 107; Ganji Shafi'i, 1983, pp. 371-376.) Moreover, some Sunni scholars have stated that the intended meaning of *Ṣādiqīn* refers to Imam Ali and the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them). According to Islamic commentators, the one who possesses the knowledge of the Book, is also Imam Ali (peace be upon him). Some prophetic traditions, such as the *Ḥadīth of Madinat al-'Ilm* (the City of Knowledge), further affirm the superiority of Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (peace be upon him) in knowledge. *Ahl al-Dhikr* verse is another verse that explicitly stipulates the scholarly authority of the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them). Considering the evidence that identifies the *Ahl al-Dhikr* as the Ahl al-Bayt, even if the intended meaning is *Ahl al-Qur'ān* (the people of the Qur'ān), the Ahl al-Bayt will still be the primary example due to their knowledge of the Qur'ān. From the perspective of the Holy Qur'ān, the Ahl al-Bayt are considered *Ḥablullah* [the rope of God] and the point of connection for all Muslims. Consequently, the correct path for practicing the religion and achieving unity among Muslims is to refer to the infallible Imams (as), who, according to Sunni scholars, are the best and most prominent *Marja'-e Ilmi* (scholarly reference) among Muslims, with Imam Ali (as) at their forefront.

---

1. Also known as Hadith al-Kisa', and The Hadith of the Cloak.



## Bibliography

1. Alusi, S. M. (1995), *Ruh al-Ma'ani fi Tafsi'r al-Qur'an-al-'Azim*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya.
2. Bahrani, S. H. (1995), *Al-Burhan fi Tafsi'r al-Qur'an*. Tehran: Bunyad-e Be'that.
3. Baladhuri, A. (1959), *Ansab al-Ashraf*. (M. B. Mahmoudi, Ed.). Egypt: Dar al-Ma'arif.
4. Baydawi, A. (1996), *Anwar al-Tanzil wa Asrar al-Ta'wil*. (M. A. al-Mar'ashli, Ed.). Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-'Arabi.
5. Dhahabi, S. A. (1960), *Mizan al-I'tidal*. (A. M. Bijawi, Ed.). Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Kotob al-Arabiyyah.
6. Dhahabi, S. A. (1996), *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'*. Beirut: Dar al-Fikr.
7. Dhahabi, S. A. (2007), *Tadhkirah al-Huffaz*. Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyyah.
8. Fakhr al-Razi, A. A. M. (1998), *Mafatih al-Ghayb*. (3rd ed.). Beirut: Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi.
9. Fooladvand, M. (2011), *The Holy Qur'an*. (Translation). Nashta.
10. Ganji Shafi'i, M. (1983), *Kifayat al-Talib fi Manaqib Ali ibn Abi Talib*. Tehran: Dar Ihya' Turath Ahl al-Bayt.
11. Hakim Nishaburi, M. (2000), *Al-Mustadrak 'ala 'Al-Sahihayn'*. (1st ed.). Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.
12. Haskani, U. (1989), *Shawahid al-Tanzeel li Qawa'id al-Tafdhil*. (M. B. Mahmoudi, Ed.). Tehran: Ministry of Islamic Guidance.
13. Haythami, I. H. (1992), *Al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqah*. Egypt: Maymaniyyah.
14. Heravi Qari, A. (2000), *Mirqat al-Mafatih Sharh 'Mishkat al-Masabih'*. (1st ed.). Beirut: Dar al-Fikr.
15. Ibn abi'l-Hadid, A. H. (1999), *Sharh Nahj al-Balagha*. (M. A. al-Fadl Ibrahim, Ed.). Cairo: Dar Ihya' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya.
16. Ibn Asakir, A. (1995), *Tarikh Madinah Dimashq*. (A. Shiri; O. Omroui, Ed.). Beirut: Dar al-Fikr.
17. Ibn Kathir, I. (1998), *Tafsi'r al-Qur'an al-'Azim*. Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyyah.
18. Ibn Qutaybah, A. (1989), *Gharib al-Qur'an*. Beirut: Dar wa Maktabat al-Hilal.
19. Ibn Sa'd, M. (1983), *Tabaqat al-Kobra*. Beirut: Dar al-Beirut.
20. Ibn Taymiyya, A. (1995), *Al-Tawassul wa-l-Wasila*. (I. Ramadan, Ed.). Beirut: Dar al-Fikr al-Lubnani.
21. Irbali, A. (2002), *Kashf al-Ghumma fi Ma'rifat al-A'imma*. (S. H. Rasuli, Ed.). Tabriz: Bani-Hashemi

22. Jahiz, A. U. A. (1987), *Rasa'il al-Jahiz*. (A. A. Mulhim, Ed.). Beirut: Dar wa Maktabah al-Hilal.
23. Maybudi, A. (1992), *Kashf al-Asrar wa 'Uddat al-Abrar*. (A. A. Hikmat, Ed.). Tehran: Amir Kabir Publications.
24. Mazandarani, I. S. A. (2000), *Manaqib Al-e Abi Talib*. Qom: Allamah Publications.
25. Mufid, M. (2003), *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Majid*. (S. M. Ali Ayazi, Ed.). Qom: Islamic Propagation Office.
26. Mufid, M. (2007), *Al-Irshad fī Ma'rifat Hujaj-Allah 'Al-al-'Ibad*. Qom: Saeed ibn Jubayr.
27. Mohammad, A. Z. (1993), *Al-Imam al-Sadiq: Hayatuhu wa 'Asruhu, Ara'uhu wa Fiqhuhu*. Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi.
28. Qal'ahji, M. R. (1981), *Mawsu'ah Fiqh Ali ibn Abi Talib*. (1st ed.). Damascus: Dar al-Fikr.
29. Qunduzi, S. (1997), *Yanabi' al-Mawadda*. Beirut: Mu'assasah al-A'lami lil-Matbou'at.
30. Qurtubi, M. (1985), *Al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'ān*. Tehran: Nasser Khosrow.
31. Qurtubi, M. (1994), *Al-Isti'ab fī Ma'rifah al-Sahaba*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya.
32. Ragheb Isfahani, H. (1990), *Al-Mufradat fī Gharib al-Qur'ān*. (S. A. Daoudi, Ed.) (1st ed.). Beirut - Damascus: Dar al-'Ilm al-Dar al-Shamiyyah.
33. Saffar, M. (2002), *Basa'ir al-Darajat fī Fada'il al-Mohammad*. (A. Kuche Baghi, Ed.). Qom: Ayatollah Mar'ashi Najafi Library.
34. Sahmi, A. al-Q. H. (1998), *Tarikh Jurjan*. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Beirut: 'Alam Al-Kutub.
35. Shahrastani, A. M. (1985), *Al-Milal wal-Nihal*. (M. F. Badran, Ed.). Qom: Manshurat al-Radi.
36. Shak'a, M. (2007), *Al-Islam Bila Mazahib*. (7th ed.). Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi.
37. Sharqawi, A. R. (1983), *Ali: Imam al-Muttaqin*. Cairo: Maktabat Gharib.
38. Sharqawi, A. R. (2005), *A'immat al-Fiqh al-Tis'a*. (2nd ed.). Beirut: Dar 'Iqra'.
39. Shirazi, A. A. I. (1987), *Tabaqāt al-Fuqahā*. (2nd ed.). Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm.
40. Shushtari, Q. N. (1997), *Ihqāq-ul-Haqq wa Izhaq-ul-Batil*. Qom: Ayatollah Mar'ashi Najafi Library.
41. Sibt ibn al-Jawzi. (2007), *Tadhkirat al-Khawas*. Qom: Dhawi al-Qurba.



42. Suyuti, J. A. R. (١٩٨٢), *Al-Durr al-Manthur fi Tafsi'r al-Ma'thur*. Qom: Ayatollah Mar'ashi Najafi Library.
43. Suyuti, J. A. R. (1997), *Tarikh al-Khulafa*. (I. Saleh, Ed.). Beirut: Dar Sadir.
44. Tabari, A. J. M. (2001), *Jami' al-Bayan fi Tafsi'r al-Qur'an*. Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa.
45. Tabari, M. (١٩٩٤), *Al-Riyadh al-Nadhras fi Manaqib al-Asharah*. Tanta: Al-Maktabah al-Islamiyyah.
46. Tabarsi, F. (١٩٩٣), *Majma' al-Bayan fi Tafsi'r al-Qur'an*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Tehran: Nasser Khusraw.
47. Tha'labi Nishaburi, A. I. A. (2000), *Al-Kashf wal-Bayan an-Tafsi'r al-Qur'an*. (A. M. Ibn Ashur, Ed.). Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi.
48. Tirmidhi, A. I. M. (1998), *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*. Beirut: Dar al-Hadith.
49. Turayhi, F. (1996), *Majma' al-Bahrain*. Tehran: Kitāb Foroushi Mortazavi.
50. Waqidi, M. (1987), *Al-Maghazi*. (M. Jones, Ed.) (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Beirut: Beirut: Mu'assasah al-A'lami lil-Matbou'at.
51. Zamakhshari, M. (1994), *Al-Kashshaf 'an Haqa'iq Ghawamidh al-Tanzeel*. Beirut: Dar al-Kitāb al-'Arabi.

