

## RELEVANT CREEDAL ISSUES HIGHLIGHTED IN THE WORKS OF IMAM MATURIDI

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### Abstract

One of the most pressing issues of our time is undoubtedly the matter of takfir (excommunication). Nowadays, many extremist groups are observed to excessively accuse Muslims of disbelief, even in matters that do not constitute disbelief. According to the Maturidi creed, such actions are considered baghiyy (rebellion). In this regard, the study of Imam Maturidi's scholarly legacy and its effective application in the fight against fanaticism are of great importance.

**Keywords:** Takfir, Baghiyy, Aqeedah, Maturidi, Ta'wilat Ahl al-Sunnah, Kharijites, Shirk, Kufr, Sect.

### Introduction

History and the present day both demonstrate that religious sectarianism, dogmatism, and fanaticism are among the most serious challenges facing humanity – particularly the Muslim world. Conflicts caused by these issues, ranging from disputes to bloody wars, have brought immense suffering to the Islamic community. Unfortunately, this process continues to this day. Especially in today's era of globalization, where the exchange of ideas has intensified on a global scale, the issue has become more pressing than ever before.

*Takfir* (Arabic: to accuse of disbelief, denial, disobedience, or rejection) refers to accusing a fellow Muslim of disbelief or faithlessness. Initially, *takfir* was used only in relation to those who explicitly rejected the Islamic creed and acted or spoke against it. However, in history, the Kharijite movement accused even Muslims who did not share their views of being disbelievers – a practice that continues today among many religious-extremist groups.

In reality, falsely accusing a Muslim of disbelief is considered an extremely grave sin. Therefore, scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah urge extreme caution in this matter. This theological issue is known in the science of Islamic creed (*‘ilm al-‘aqidah*) as the “Issue of Names and Rulings” (*al-asmā’ wa-l-aḥkām*). That is, *al-asmā’* refers to religious labels and identities such as disbeliever, Muslim, sinner, evildoer, and hypocrite, while *al-aḥkām* refers to the worldly and otherworldly consequences attached to these labels.

The topic of *al-asmā’ wa-l-aḥkām* is a serious matter, as it relates to divine rewards and punishments in the Hereafter, as well as judgments such as friendship and enmity, execution and safety in this world. On this issue, the Maturidi and Ash‘ari schools of thought generally align in their views.

### **Main Part**

The Ahl al-Sunnah has adopted a balanced and moderate approach in this matter. That is, in labeling Muslims with the aforementioned terms and identities, they did not go to extremes like the Kharijites and the Mu‘tazilites, nor did they take a superficial stance like the Murji’ites who claimed, “Sins and disobedience have no effect on a believer”.

For example, in his interpretation of the verse from the Noble Qur’an:

“And do not say to one who offers you peace [or submits to you], ‘You are not a believer,’ seeking the goods of worldly life...” (Surah al-Nisa, 4:94) [1:93].

Imam Maturidi explains as follows:

“We do not know the exact incident that caused this verse to be revealed. However, it contains a command to refrain from doubt and to halt accusations when someone declares the word of faith. It is therefore obligatory to abstain from suspicion concerning a believer's actions and statements. For Allah Almighty says: ‘And do not say to one who offers you peace [or submits to you], “You are not a believer”. This is a command to be absolutely certain in actions. Hence, if Allah prohibits calling them ‘not believers,’ it naturally implies a command to regard them as believers. If anyone disagrees with this, the response should be: ‘Are you more knowledgeable than Allah?’” [2:424]

The contemporary Maturidi scholar Adil Bebek, summarizing the core principles in Maturidi's works, describes the essence of disbelief (*kufr*) as follows:

“According to Maturidism, *kufṛ* is: not recognizing Allah, not submitting to Him, rejecting His oneness, not loving Him from the heart, opposing the Creator, declaring Him a liar and denying Him, showing disregard for Allah and His Messenger, and knowingly declaring as lawful that which Allah has declared forbidden” [3:150].

Therefore, if none of the above traits are found in a person, no one has the right to label them as a disbeliever. For this reason, the practice of today’s misguided sects and jihadist groups – accusing Muslims of disbelief simply because they do not fully implement Shariah, and considering their blood lawful – cannot be justified under any circumstances.

Imam Maturidi offers a clear and concise interpretation of the following verse, which is frequently misinterpreted by many deviant sects today:

“And whoever does not judge by what Allah has revealed – then it is they who are the disbelievers” (Surah al-Ma’idah: 44) [1:115].

He states briefly but precisely:

“Whoever denies the necessity of judging by what Allah has revealed, and does not consider His judgment as truth – that person is indeed a disbeliever” [4:237].

On the interpretation of this verse, Ibn ‘Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him), who was honored with titles such as “The Interpreter of the Qur’an” and “The Ocean of Knowledge,” said:

“Whoever rejects any of Allah’s limits (laws) becomes a disbeliever. However, if a person acknowledges and affirms them but fails to rule accordingly, he does not become a disbeliever but rather a sinner (*fāsiq*)” [5:439].

Clearly, the claims of extremist groups who declare Muslim leaders disbelievers merely for not ruling entirely by Shariah are baseless and unjustified.

Another serious topic related to the abovementioned critical issues is the matter of *baghiyy* (rebellion). Today, many misguided sects and movements, due to such distorted understandings, accuse their own state leaders of disbelief and rise against them. Certain malicious forces are skillfully exploiting these sensitive matters. As a result, innocent people – often Muslims – are being killed unjustly.

Islamic scholars have derived their rulings on the issue of rebellion (*baghiyy*) from the following verse:

“And if two groups among the believers fight, make peace between them. But if one of them oppresses the other, then fight against the one that transgresses until it

returns to the command of Allah. And if it returns, then make peace between them with justice and act justly. Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly”.

(Surah al-Hujurat: 9) [1:516].

In his commentary on this verse, Imam Maturidi states:

“From this verse, one can understand the events between Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah be pleased with him) and the people of Harura and Nahrawan. When Ali (r.a.) waged war against them, some people asked, ‘Are they polytheists (mushriks)?’ Ali replied, ‘They have moved past the stage of shirk.’ Then they asked, ‘Are they hypocrites (munafiqs)?’ He said, ‘Hypocrites rarely remember Allah.’ The people then asked, ‘So who are they?’ Ali (r.a.) replied, ‘They are a group who have aggressed and fought against us; thus, we fought back against them’ [6:67-68].

Additionally, in interpreting the part of the verse:

“But if one of them oppresses the other, then fight against the one that transgresses until it returns to the command of Allah”,

Maturidi explains:

“That is, if one of the two groups commits injustice and demands something illegitimate, then fight against the aggressors until they return to Allah’s command and to what is right. Here, Allah commands us to support the oppressed group and defend them from the transgressors. If it is possible to halt the aggression and rebellion without using weapons, then that is the correct and obligatory approach. However, if stopping them without combat is not possible, then there is no harm in resorting to force. Indeed, Ali (r.a.), along with senior Companions, fought against the rebels” [6:68-69].

The root cause of rebellion (*baghiyy*) lies in disobedience to leaders and authorities. Allah says in the Qur’an:

“O you who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you” (Surah al-Nisa: 59) [1:87].

In his commentary on this verse, Imam Maturidi states:

“Scholars have differed regarding the identity of ‘those in authority among you’. Some have said they are the *commanders* or *military leaders*. Others have said they are the *scholars and jurists*, or the *people of virtue and goodness*... This verse indicates that, whether military commanders or otherwise, the leader must be someone knowledgeable and farsighted. For Allah is commanding obedience to only those who possess knowledge and vision... Allah’s earlier statement in the

same passage, ‘If you judge between people, judge with justice,’ also shows that ‘those in authority’ are leaders or rulers. Because in the previous verse, Allah commands the rulers to act with justice, and the followers to obey what is ruled and commanded... Ibn Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) narrates from the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him):

“It is obligatory for a Muslim to obey (his leader) whether he likes it or not, as long as he is not commanded to commit a sin. If he is ordered to commit a sin, then there is no listening or obedience” [7:292–293].

Today, extremist groups (‘*aqidah-based sectarians*’) use incorrect interpretations of Qur’anic verses not only to stir up hostility towards people of other faiths, but also to incite division and hostility among Muslim communities themselves. In such a context, the need for traditional interpretations of the Qur’an – such as those found in *Ta’wilat Ahl al-Sunna* – is greater than ever.

## Summary

The sects such as Kharijites, Mu’tazilites, Qadariyyah, Jabariyyah, Jahmiyyah, and Karmatians, which once emerged and caused many fitnas (trials and tribulations) in the Islamic world, have now become history. Their place has been taken by new names such as pseudo-Salafism, Hizb ut-Tahrir, and jihadis. When comparing these sects with the misguided movements of the past, their origins and beliefs reveal many common features. In particular, the issues on which these misguided sects and movements differ from Ahl al-Sunnah are very similar to each other. Especially in recent years, pseudo-Salafis and jihadi groups have caused fitnas concerning matters of faith, disbelief, and polytheism, resulting in numerous calamities befalling Muslims.

The interpretation of the above-mentioned verses shows that Abu Mansur al-Maturidi was able to provide correct solutions and wise conclusions to a number of problems that have caused many fitnas in the Islamic world from the time of the Companions until today. For this reason, the scholarly legacy of this great scholar holds great practical significance in resolving many theological disputes existing in the present time.

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