

Obeying the Governments & Authorities¹

Question: There are some people who are confused with regards to obeying the authorities. Some say that (1) giving the pledge of allegiance is only to be done to the main leader of all the Muslims in the world. Others say that (2) nothing is binding of obedience upon them because they did not personally go and pledge allegiance before the ruler, while others claim that (3) such obedience is only to the king and not to others of (lesser) authority. What do you say about this?

Answer: No doubt, this is incorrect. If such a person were to die, he would die in a state of Jāhiliyyah because he would die while not having allegiance to anyone.² The general rule in Islamic legislation is that Allāh says:

﴿ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ﴾

That is the Book. There is no doubt in it, and it is guidance for the Muttaqīn

(those who are constantly fearful of Allaah).

[Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:2]

If no supreme leader over all Muslims in the world exists, then whoever happens to be the leader in one’s region – he is the leader. Otherwise, if we were to accept this erroneous opinion, then that would mean there is no legitimate Muslim leader of anyone today, and everyone that dies do so in a state of Jāhiliyyah (according to the ḥadīth) Who says this?

The Islamic nation during the time of the companions was widely spread out. You know that ‘Abd Allāh Ibn al-Zubayr was in Mecca, (the leaders of) Banū ‘Umayyah were in al-Shām (Syria), some people were in Yemen, and others in Egypt. The Muslims have

¹ This fatwā was taken from a book called “al-Fatāwā Ash-Shar’iyyah fī Al-Qaḍāyā Al-‘Aṣriyyah,” a collection of various rulings by Muḥammad Ibn Fahd al-Ḥuṣayn.

² He’s referring to the ḥadīth, “Whoever meets Allāh (dies) with no allegiance of obedience upon him, he dies in a state of Jāhiliyyah (pre-Islamic state of ignorance).” It is recorded by Muslim (no. 4770). - T.N.

always held the belief that the pledge of obedience is binding upon them to whoever is in authority over the land in which they reside. They pledge to obey him, calling him the “Leader of the Believers”. No one denies that. Rejecting this is a form of inciting dissension and mutiny among the Muslims from the point of one assuming that there’s no obedience to anyone binding upon him and because it is contradictory to the unanimous opinions of the Muslims since the earliest times.

The messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said:

اسْمَعُوا وَأَطِيعُوا وَإِنْ اسْتَعْمِلَ عَلَيْكُمْ عَبْدٌ حَبَشِيٌّ

“Listen and obey even if an Abyssinian slave is put in authority over you.”³

That’s the reply to the first issue.

The second one says he hasn’t personally given this oath of obedience to anyone. This is actually the call of the ignorant, from the most ignorant servants of Allaah. When the Companions gave the pledge to Abū Bakr, did every single crippled person, elderly, and child physically come and give the pledge or was it mainly those of position and authority?

Those people having status among the people and authority were the ones who came and physically gave the pledge of obedience. Did all of the people from the children, the elderly, male and female, all come and give the oath personally? If the people of position and authority give the oath of obedience to the leader of any land, then the pledge of allegiance is complete, such a leader is then a legitimate leader, and obedience to him is binding upon the people.

The third says all the people did not give the pledge to the king. How do they know the people did not give this pledge to the king? Of course the people gave the oath of obedience to the king. I was present during the pledge of allegiance to King Khalid (the former king of Saudi Arabia) and King Fahd (the king of Saudi Arabia at the time Ibn al-’Uthaymīn gave this ruling). Yes, it’s correct that every single child and elderly person did not physically come and make this pledge before him, but it was the people of position and authority that made it.

³ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 661) and Muslim (4732).

Furthermore, if a person is placed in authority over any land and were he to have an heir, then his heir could be the leader after him. If the leadership of the first ends, the second would become the leader even if the people did not actually come to him personally to renew the allegiance. This is for the ease and well-being of the people.

If we were to say there's no contract of leadership for the second unless and until he is given the pledge of obedience by the people again, then turmoil and disorder would result. Such opinions are thrown into the hearts of ignorant people by Satan in order to divide the body of Muslims and to sow discord among the people as the messenger (صلى

الله عليه وسلم) explained in his statement:

إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ قَدْ أَيْسَ أَنْ يُعْبَدَ فِي جَزِيرَةِ الْعَرَبِ وَلَكِنْ فِي التَّحْرِيشِ

“Indeed, Satan has lost all hope of ever being worshipped in the Arabian Peninsula. However, he will sow discord among them.”⁴

So convey my advice to such people to fear Allāh (ﷻ) and to know that they are now under the leadership and obedience of the one in authority over him so that they don't die in a state of Jāhiliyyah.⁵

⁴ Recorded by Muslim (no. 2812).

⁵ Taken from Naẓarāt Taṣāliyyah by Doctor Sulaymān Ibn 'Abd Allāh Abū al-Khayl, the vice president of Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University (pg. 473).