

Are the Khawārij Those Who Only Revolt Against a Just Ruler?

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Question: What is your view of someone who says, “The Khawārij are the people who revolt only against a legitimate and just ruler. As for someone who revolts against an actual oppressive ruler, then he is not one of the Khawārij”?

Answer: ‘Abd al-Mālik Ibn Marwān used to be an oppressive ruler. He killed (the companion) ‘Abd Allāh Ibn Az-Zubayr and one of Ibn Marwān’s delegates even destroyed the Ka’bah. Still, (the companion) ‘Abd Allāh Ibn ‘Umar maintained allegiance and obedience to him after all this, and the remaining companions did the same. By Allāh, he was oppressive, may Allāh have mercy on him. He did have good qualities, he did good deeds, he had victorious conquests, and he performed (legitimate) Jihād. Yet, by Allāh, he was an oppressor, he was unjust. The messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) taught time and time again about these circumstances, and these texts are in the two authentic ḥadīth collections (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim & Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī) and in other collections. For example, he said (about the rulers):

أَطِيعُوهُمْ مَا أَقَامُوا فِيكُمْ الصَّلَاةَ

“Obey them as long as they establish the prayer among you.”

And he said:

تَعْرِفُونَ وَتُنْكِرُونَ

“(You will see things from them) that you know (to be right) and things you dislike.”

And when asked, “Should we oppose them with our swords?” he said:

لا , مَا صَلُّوا

“No, not as long as they pray.”

These texts were regarding unjust rulers and still the messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) instructed (the people) to have patience with them. He did not allow rebelling and opposing them. The one who revolts and renounces allegiance to them (the leaders), then he does so against all the Muslims. In this case, such a person should be killed (legitimately – by capital punishment), even if the ruler he opposed was indeed oppressive.

This understanding is from the Khawārij themselves – they say, “Someone is not considered to be one of the Khawārij unless the ruler he revolts against is a just leader.” By this, they mean that ‘Alī (رضي الله عنه) was unjust and Uthmān (رضي الله عنه) was unjust.

Also, those people who glorify Sayyid Qutb view ‘Uthmān as not being a just leader even if they conceal it. Otherwise, why would they glorify Sayyid Qutb who criticizes the justice of ‘Uthmān and nullifies and discredits his leadership? And the leadership (of a ruler) is not to be discredited except in the case of clear disbelief, yet he (Sayyid Qutb) does so because he is a Takfīrī (someone who wrongfully and indiscriminately criticizes people of having committed disbelief). He is the chief of Takfīrīs! He was unable to openly proclaim ‘Uthmān’s disbelief and that of the Rawāfiḍ (the extreme Shīas who curse the companions) at the same time. He actually combined between the Khawārij and Rawāfiḍ ideologies. He carried the banner of the Khawārij and that of the Rawāfiḍ, along with other banners. He made ‘Uthmān (رضي الله عنه) out to be a tyrant so we could legitimately rebel against them, and he considered ‘Alī too as an oppressor so we could revolt against him as well and likewise (is the pattern).

And Dhū al-Khuwaysarah – you saw how he discredited even the justice of the messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم). So the issue reaches a point to which there is no limit or

real criterion to judge it. Someone who you may consider just is not considered to be just by the one who rebels against him!

So, the solution is that as long as the ruler is within the circle of Islam – and the messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) clearly defined it – then even if such a ruler were wicked and oppressive; as long as he is within Islam, as long as he establishes prayer, then it is impermissible to oppose and revolt against him. Have you all understood this? This is the ruling of Allāh and the ruling of the messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم), not the ruling of the ignorant people.