

MADINAH COLLEGE L O N D O N

Course

Alimiyyah: Usul al-Tafsir 1

Instructor

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Preface

All praises are due to Allah, I bear witness that none has the right to be worshipped except Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is His worshipper and messenger, May Allah's peace and blessings be upon him, his family, his companions and the people of emaan who came after them.

This is a summary of '***Muqadimah Usul al-Tafsir***' (An Introduction To The Principles Of Tafsir). The main topics remain and all the words are those of the author ***Abul-Abbas Ibn Taymiyyah al-Hafeed***, and the summary is from **Dr. Salih al-'Usaymee**

Introduction

In the name of Allah, the most gracious, the most merciful

All praise is due to Allah. We seek him assistance and His forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allah from the evil of ourselves and the evil of our actions. Whomsoever Allah guides none can misguide him, and whomsoever Allah misguides none can guide him.

I bear witness that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah alone, without partner. I bear witness that Muhammad is His slave and Messenger. May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him.

1.1

It is a must to know that the Prophet explained (made clear) the meanings of the Quran to his companions just as he taught them its words. Allah's saying: ***That you may make clear to the people what was sent down to them (16:44)***

1.2

It is well known that the objective of all statements is not just to understand the words being spoken, but also the meanings behind those words. The Quran is more befitting of this.

1.3

Also, custom prevents a person from reading a book in a particular subject like medicine or maths, without seeking to understand it. So how about the speech of Allah, which is the source of their success and salvation and the establishment of their worldly affairs and hereafter.

1.4

Therefore, the companions of the prophet muhammad hardly differed in the tafsir (interpretation) of the Quran and while the tabi'een differed more than the Sahabah, it was still considerably less in relation to those who came after them. The more righteous the generation, the more ilm (knowledge), i'tilaaf (unity) and bayaan (clarity) they had.

1.5

The point here is that the tabi'un (followers of the sahabah) studied tafsir of the Quran from the companions, like they studied the Sunnah from them. They would also comment on the Quran with deductions and seeking evidences, just as they commented on the some of the sunnah using deductions and seeking evidences.

Chapter On Differences Of Opinions Amongst The Predecessors In The Tafsir Of The Quran And That It Is A Difference Of Variation

2.1

The difference of opinion amongst the salaf in tafsir was minimal. They differed more in fiqh rulings (*ahkaam*) than they did in tafsir. Most of their differences in tafsir of the Quran is a difference of variation (*tanawwu'*) than contradiction (*tadaad*) and that is two categories:

2.2

The first category: the expression of one and the same idea by using different words, such as them referring to the same concept by one mentioning a particular aspect concerning it and the other mentioning another aspect. These explanations are like using equivalent names which lie between

synonyms and antonyms. Similar to this are the names of Allah, the names of the Prophet and the names of the Quran. The names of Allah all refer to Him, the Most High.

2.3

The second category: to mention by way of example and illustration some aspects of the general term being referred to, in order to draw attention of the listener to the type of thing that is being referred to and not to completely define the boundaries of the word.

2.4

From this category is also the statement: the reason behind the verse was revealed was due to such and such, especially if it was due to a person. This is the case with the background regarding the revelation of certain verses.

2.5

Knowledge of the reasons for which a verse was revealed assists one in understanding that verse, for knowledge of the cause helps to bring about knowledge of the result.

2.6

Their statement: “this verse was revealed due to such and such” can sometimes mean that this was the reason the verse was revealed. It can also sometimes imply that this meaning is also present in the verse even if it is not the reason for the revelation, ie the meaning of the verse is such and such.

2.7

When this is known and one states: “this verse was revealed due to this”, this does not contradict a similar statement from someone else, so long as the word can include both meanings as we have explained when discussing tafsir by way of example. Likewise, if one mentions a reason for which the verse was revealed and then another mentions a different reason, it is possible that

both are speaking the truth and that the verse was revealed after a number of incidents took place, or the verse was revealed twice, on each occasion for a different reason.

2.8

These two different categories of tafsir which we have just mentioned - variation in names and attributes or difference categories and types with which they are described such as illustrations - are the two most predominant types of tafsir found among the predecessors which it is thought of as differences.

2.9

Another type of difference which can be found is where we have ambiguous words. This can be done in two ways.

Firstly, it is ambiguous because it has a number of meanings in the language, such as the word 'qaswarah' which can refer to a shooter or a lion, and the word 'as'asa' which can refer to both the advent of the night as well as its departure.

Or it is because even though the word originally only has one meaning, it denotes one of two different types or one of two things such as a subject pronoun which at times can refer to a number of things, like in the verse: ***"then he approached and descended. And was at a distance of two bow lengths or nearer (3:8-9)*** and like the word: ***'the fajr (the day break), al-shaf' (the even), al-watr (the odd)*** and ***layaalin 'ashar (the ten nights)***. It is possible that these words have the meanings the salaf gave to them, or their meanings could be otherwise.

2.10

Another statement of theirs which is commonly thought to be a difference of opinion, is when they express an opinion each using a different choice of words. These words are similar in their connotations but not synonymous; this is even rarer in the Quran it not non-existent. It is rare to express the exact same meaning using two sets of words, at best, the meanings will be approximate. This is from the miracles of the Quran.

2.11

From here, we can see the mistake made by those who substitute certain words with others. The correct opinion is that of the grammarians of the Basrah school who state that it is a case of implication.

2.12

Even with all of the above, there does exist genuine differences of opinion amongst the salaf, such as there does exist differences of opinion amongst the salaf in issues of islamic rulings.

Chapter On The Two Types Of Differences In Tafsir Of The Quran Relating To The Source: Narrations And Deductions

3.1

Differences in tafsir can be of two types: the source of the first is the narrations and the other type is derived from different means. Knowledge is either a truthful narration, or a valid deduction. The narration either originates from somebody who is infallible or somebody who is not infallible. The aim is that that narrations, irrespective of whether they originate from an infallible authority or not - this is the first type: then from them are those which we can know the authentic from the inauthentic, and others that we are unable to know the authentic from the inauthentic.

3.2

Authentic narrations from the *sahaabah* (companions) are more reliable than narrations from the *tabi'een* (students of the companions) as it is a stronger possibility that the companion heard his opinion from the Prophet (peace be upon him) or from another of the companions who in turn heard it from the Prophet (peace be upon him). Additionally, the companions narrations from the people of the book are less than that of the *tabi'een*. Also, when a companion firmly holds on to an opinion, how can it be said he has taken this opinion from the People of the Book when they were forbidden from believing them.

Chapter On The Second Type Of Differences In Tafsir Relating To Reasoning And Deductions

4.1

The second of the two types in which differences happen relates to reasoning and deduction as opposed to narrations. Most mistakes which occur in tafsir are as a result of two things which appeared after the generation of the companions, their students (tabi'un) and those who followed them in righteousness.

4.2

The first is a group of people of a certain aqidah interpreting the Quran to fit their ideology.

4.3

The second is a group of people who interpreted the Quran just as an average Arabic speaker would, without considering from whom these words came, to whom it was revealed and who they were addressing.

4.4

The first group focused on meanings that suited them without paying attention to the real wording and what they indicate and prove

The second group focused on the words and how they were used by the Arabs and disregarded the context of the verses. This group mistakenly interprets the words of the Arabic language thinking that their interpretations are linguistically correct. The first group also falls into this error, but more so as they mistakenly interpret the meanings of the Quran, the other group is also guilty of this. The first group prefers to concentrate on meanings and the other group places emphasis on words. The first group is divided into two groups:

sometimes stripping the words of the Quran of their real and intended meaning,

sometimes giving the words meanings which they do not convey.

In both instances:

That which they affirm or negate of the meaning may be incorrect and therefore they have erred in both the evidence and the ideology which they wish to support with it,

or that particular idea may be correct in which case they have only erred in the way they use the evidence.

Chapter On The Best Method Of Tafsir

5.1

If somebody were to ask: what is the best method of tafsir?

5.2

The answer is: the most valid method is to first explain the Quran with the Quran: what is mentioned in general in one place is explained in detail in another place and what is summarised in one place is expounded on in another place.

5.3

If you are unable to do this, then the Sunnah is an explanation of the Quran. If you do not find the tafsir in the Quran or the Sunnah you go to the sayings of the companions.

5.4

But sometimes it is narrated from them sayings of the people of the book which the Prophet (peace be upon him) allowed in his statement: "convey from me even if it is a verse, and there is not harm in narrating from the Children of Israel, but whosoever intentionally ascribes lies to me will take his place in the Fire. Collected by al-Bukhari from the hadith of Abdullah ibn 'Amr.

5.5

However these Israelite traditions are quoted as supporting evidences and not primary sources. These traditions are three types:

One: a type which is authentic as its truthfulness is attested to by our own sources

Two: a type which is false as our own sources reject it

Three: a type which does not fall into the previous two categories, we can neither judge it to be authentic or inauthentic. We neither believe in it nor reject it. It is allowed to quote this type, even though most of what is contained in it is of no immediate benefit.

5.6

The scholars of the People of the Book differ considerably regarding this third category, and the scholars of tafsir also differ in this regard....which possess no immediate benefit in worldly affairs or religious affairs. However, one may mention the difference of opinion in these matters.

Chapter On Tafsir Of The Quran With The Sayings Of The Tabi'un (Successors)

6.1

If one is unable to find the explanation of a verse of the Quran or Sunnah, and does not find any relevant commentaries from the companions, then many of the scholars used the statements of the successors. Their sayings are quoted and at times there is a difference in the wording, those who are not grounded in knowledge believe it to be differences of opinion and quote it as such. This is not the case, as some of them mention something by using what is necessitates or what it resembles, whilst others directly mention what they are referring to. All of it is of single meaning in most places, so let the intelligent take notice of that, and guidance is from Allah.

6.2

Shu'bah bin Hajjaj and others mentioned that the sayings of the tabi'un in matters such as practical rulings are not a proof, so how can they be a proof in tafsir?

6.3

Meaning that their opinions are not a proof over those who hold opposing views, and this is correct. As for when they all agree on something then without doubt it is sufficient as a proof. If they differ, then one view is not a proof over the other view and on the person who comes after them. Instead, when they differ, one goes back to the language of the Quran or the Sunnah, or the Arabic Language in general, or the sayings of the salaf.

6.4

Interpretation of the Quran based solely on one's reasoning (intellect) is Haram.

6.5

As for the reports that Mujahid, Qatadah and others would interpret the Quran, one does not believe that they commented on the Quran without knowledge or that they spoke based on their desires / intellects. There are many narrations from them which prove that they did not use their own reasoning to interpret the Quran.

6.6

Therefore, a number of Salaf would excuse themselves of interpreting the verses they had no knowledge of.

6.7

These reports and others from the pious predecessors all state the impermissibility of speaking about tafsir without knowledge. However, there is no harm speaking about tafsir if one possess the relevant linguistic and

religious knowledge. It is for this reason that there are a number of varying statements reported from these scholars. This does not imply contradiction, for they spoke about matters they had knowledge of, and remained silent on that which they had no knowledge of.

6.8

This is what is obligatory upon everyone. Just as one should remain silent about that which he is ignorant of, likewise he should speak about that which he possess knowledge of when he is asked concerning it, as Allah says: ***You must make clear (explain) to the the people and not conceal it. (3:187)***

Also based on what is reported in the hadith, "***Whoever is asked about a matter and conceals it, will be given a bridle of fire on judgement day***".

Allah is all knowing.