



SALAF AL-SALIH

FOUNDATIONS OF UNDERSTANDING THE RELIGION

Understanding the Religion: Upon the Way of the Salaf

From Revelation to Beneficial Knowledge, Worship,
and Action

Understanding the religion is to receive the Qur'an and
authentic Sunnah upon the inherited way of the
Sahabah and Salaf, so that beneficial knowledge
becomes sound belief, worship, action, character, and
da'wah.

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FOUNDATIONS OF UNDERSTANDING THE RELIGION - ARTICLE 05

Understanding the Religion: Upon the Way of the Salaf

From Revelation to Beneficial Knowledge, Worship, and Action

Understanding the religion is an Allah-given comprehension of revelation that produces correct belief, sincere worship, sound action, proper application, and steadfast following. This study explains why the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah are received through the inherited way of the Sahabah and the Salaf, and how the Islamic sciences preserve that understanding.

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Bismillah ar-Rahman ar-Rahim.

The religion is not understood merely by gathering information, memorizing isolated quotations, possessing books, adopting a label, or becoming skilled in argument. Sound understanding is a favor from Allah: revelation is received correctly, its intended meanings are learned, its evidences are placed in their proper order, and knowledge becomes belief, worship, action, character, and da'wah.

The Qur'an and authentic Sunnah are the foundation. They are understood through the explanation and application of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, the transmitted understanding of his Companions, the inherited way of the praised early generations, and the disciplined work of qualified scholars. The Islamic sciences preserve this inheritance: tafsir explains the Qur'an; hadith criticism safeguards Prophetic transmission; fiqh identifies practical rulings; usul al-fiqh governs derivation; legal maxims organize recurring juristic patterns; and Arabic opens deeper access to the language of revelation.

This inherited method does not make every individual scholar infallible, turn later scholars into independent legislators, or erase recognized scholarly disagreement. It places every statement beneath the authority of revelation, honors established consensus, benefits from the imams and later scholars, and distinguishes the collective path of the Salaf from every isolated opinion attributed to an early person.

The goal is not merely to claim attachment to the Salaf. It is to enter their inherited path of revelation, knowledge, worship, action, verification, humility, justice, and character.

Introduction - When Allah Wants Good for a Servant

Mu'awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan رضي الله عنه reported that the Prophet ﷺ said:

من يرد الله به خيرا يفقهه في الدين

"Whoever Allah intends good for, He grants him understanding of the religion."

Source and authenticity: Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 71; Sahih Muslim, no. 1037b. Authentic and agreed upon in its core wording.

The hadith does not identify mere exposure to information as the sign of intended good. It identifies *fiqh in the religion*: sound comprehension of what Allah revealed, the ability to distinguish foundations from branches, and the guidance to place knowledge where it belongs.

The wording also reminds the servant that understanding is granted by Allah. The student takes the lawful means: sincerity, supplication, study, reliable teachers, careful reading, memorization, reflection, verification, worship, and action. Yet success is not produced independently by intelligence or effort. A person may possess a strong memory, a large library, fluency in speech, or access to thousands of texts while remaining confused about priorities, meanings, evidentiary weight, or application. Another may know less in quantity but understand the foundation, follow the proof, act with humility, and speak with restraint.

The longer routes of the hadith must remain distinct. Sahih al-Bukhari no. 71 adds that the Prophet ﷺ is a distributor while Allah gives, and that a group of the Ummah will remain standing upon Allah's command. Sahih Muslim no. 1037d contains another expanded wording. These authentic clauses support related subjects, but they are not to be combined into an artificial single narration. The short common wording is sufficient to govern the present article.

Projects 1 through 4 established that Tawhid is creation's greatest need, that Tawhid means singling out Allah in what is exclusive to Him, that worship belongs to Allah alone, and that Tawhid must be given priority. The next question is therefore unavoidable: how is the religion itself correctly received, understood, and lived? The answer begins with revelation and continues through the inherited understanding of the Sahabah and those who followed them with excellence.

1. What Is Understanding of the Religion?

The word *fiqh* originally signifies deep understanding. In the central hadith, *fiqh in the religion* is broader than the later technical discipline that deals specifically with practical legal rulings.

Shaykh Abd al-Razzaq ibn Abd al-Muhsin al-Badr explained:

الفقه في الدين يتناول الفقه الأكبر والأصغر؛ أما الأكبر: فهو الاعتقاد والتوحيد الذي عليه قيام دين الله تبارك وتعالى، وأما الأصغر: فهو العبادات بأنواعها فرضها ونفلها. وقول النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم: «من يرد الله به خيراً يفقهه في الدين» يتناول هذين الفقهين معا

"Fiqh in the religion includes the greater and lesser fiqh. The greater is belief and Tawhid upon which Allah's religion stands, and the lesser is worship in its various obligatory and voluntary forms. The Prophet's statement, 'Whoever Allah intends good for, He grants him understanding of the religion,' includes both forms together."

Source: Abd al-Razzaq al-Badr, official website article, *al-Fiqh al-Akbar wa-l-Asghar*. Official web witness; no printed page is claimed.

Accordingly, understanding the religion includes knowing Tawhid and iman, Allah's Names and Attributes, the Qur'an and Sunnah, worship, commands and prohibitions, lawful and unlawful matters, the duties of the heart and limbs, evidences, priorities, and correct application. It includes both foundations and branches.

This broad meaning does not diminish technical fiqh. Technical fiqh is an indispensable Islamic science. It organizes the practical rulings governing purification, prayer, fasting, zakah, pilgrimage, family matters, transactions, judiciary, and other obligations. The distinction is one of context: the Prophetic expression is comprehensive, while the later technical use identifies a particular discipline within that comprehensive religion.

Understanding must also be distinguished from its means. Memorizing Qur'an and hadith is noble. Preserving precise wordings is one of the foundations of scholarship. Books, notes, indexes, recordings, and searchable databases are valuable. None of them, however, is identical to complete understanding.

A person may know a quotation but not know whether it is authentic. He may know an authentic text but misunderstand its indication. He may know a general principle but apply it to a particular person without the required facts, conditions, and impediments. He may know one proof while remaining unaware of a qualifying text. He may repeat a technical label without living its reality.

Praised fiqh therefore includes:

- understanding meanings rather than merely reproducing sounds;
- knowing the difference between revelation and scholarly explanation;

- recognizing which proofs are explicit and which conclusions are inferred;
- distinguishing established consensus from a majority or individual opinion;
- placing foundational obligations before subsidiary disputes;
- joining knowledge to sincere worship and action;
- and applying general principles with justice, verification, and restraint.

The Qur'an may be a proof for its possessor or against him, and the Prophet ﷺ sought refuge from knowledge that does not benefit. Thus, the quantity of information alone cannot be the final measure. The governing question is whether knowledge is sound, correctly understood, sincerely sought, and followed.

2. Revelation Has an Intended Meaning

The religion originates with Allah. It is not produced by independent human legislation.

Allah said:

اتبعوا ما أنزل إليكم من ربكم ولا تتبعوا من دونه أولياء قليلا ما تذكرون

"Follow what has been sent down to you from your Lord, and do not follow protectors besides Him. Little do you take heed."

Source: Qur'an, al-A'raf 7:3.

Allah also said:

أم لهم شركاء شرعوا لهم من الدين ما لم يأذن به الله

"Or do they have partners who legislated for them in the religion what Allah did not authorize?"

Source: Qur'an, al-Shura 42:21, relevant clause.

Allah legislates. The Messenger ﷺ conveys and explains by revelation. Scholars preserve, authenticate, reconcile, derive, apply, and teach. Juristic derivation is not an independent right to create religion; it is a disciplined effort to identify Allah's ruling from the evidence.

Revelation also conveys intended meanings. Allah said:

كتاب أنزلناه إليك مبارك ليدبروا آياته وليتذكر أولو الألباب

"A blessed Book We have sent down to you so that they may reflect upon its verses and so that people of understanding may take heed."

Source: Qur'an, Sad 38:29.

Reflection would be meaningless if revelation possessed no intended guidance. Yet commanded reflection is not unrestricted private reinterpretation. The meanings are governed by the text, the authentic Sunnah, Arabic, context, transmitted explanation, and established principles.

Allah said concerning the function of His Messenger ﷺ:

وَأَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نَزَلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

"We sent down the Reminder to you so that you may make clear to the people what was sent down to them, and so that they may reflect."

Source: Qur'an, al-Nahl 16:44.

The Qur'an was therefore not delivered as a bare document detached from Prophetic teaching. The Messenger ﷺ recited it, explained it, embodied its commands, judged by it, clarified its general texts, and taught the acts of worship it required.

Allah said:

هو الذي بعث في الأميين رسولا منهم يتلو عليهم آياته ويزكيهم ويعلمهم الكتاب والحكمة وإن كانوا من قبل لفی ضلال مبين

"He is the One who sent among the unlettered a Messenger from themselves, reciting His verses to them, purifying them, and teaching them the Book and the Wisdom, although before that they were in clear error."

Source: Qur'an, al-Jumu'ah 62:2.

Recitation, teaching, and purification are joined. Sound understanding therefore cannot be reduced to linguistic possibility, philosophical speculation, changing ideology, or personal preference. It submits to what Allah revealed and to the explanation of His Messenger ﷺ.

3. Upon the Way of the Salaf

In the strict chronological sense required here, the righteous Salaf are the Sahabah, the Tabi'in, and the followers of the Tabi'in: the three generations praised in the authentic Sunnah. Later imams who remained upon their path are their followers, transmitters, explainers, and defenders. They are not automatically members of the chronological Salaf merely because they were great scholars.

Why does the inherited way of those early generations matter?

First, the Sahabah received the Qur'an and Sunnah directly from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. They heard his explanation, observed his worship, knew many of the circumstances surrounding revelation, spoke the Arabic in which it was revealed, and witnessed practical application. Individual Companions differed in attendance, memory, specialization, and juristic knowledge, but their collective proximity is unique.

Second, Allah praised the first believers and those who follow them correctly:

والسابقون الأولون من المهاجرين والأنصار والذين اتبعوهم بإحسان رضي الله عنهم ورضوا عنه وأعد لهم جنات تجري تحتها الأنهار خالدين فيها أبداً ذلك الفوز العظيم

"The first forerunners among the Muhajirun and the Ansar, and those who follow them with excellence - Allah is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him. He has prepared for them gardens beneath which rivers flow, remaining there forever. That is the great success."

Source: Qur'an, al-Tawbah 9:100.

The qualification "with excellence" must remain visible. The verse does not praise a bare claim of following while belief, worship, or conduct contradicts the path followed.

Third, Allah condemned opposing the Messenger and following a path other than that of the believers:

ومن يشاقق الرسول من بعد ما تبين له الهدى ويتبع غير سبيل المؤمنين نوله ما تولى ونصله جهنم وساءت مصيرا

"Whoever opposes the Messenger after guidance has become clear to him and follows a path other than the path of the believers, We will leave him to what he has chosen and burn him in Hell - an evil destination."

Source: Qur'an, al-Nisa' 4:115.

The explicit text condemns opposition to the Messenger and departure from the believers' path. Usul scholars also cite the verse among the evidences for the authority of established consensus. That detailed usul conclusion is a scholarly inference from the verse and must not be presented as though every technical statement about ijma' were the verse's direct wording.

Fourth, the Prophet ﷺ testified to the comparative excellence of the earliest generations:

خير الناس قرني، ثم الذين يلونهم، ثم الذين يلونهم

"The best people are my generation, then those who follow them, then those who follow them."

Source and authenticity: Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 6429, from Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud رضى الله عنه. See also Sahih Muslim, no. 2533a. Authentic and agreed upon in meaning.

This generational virtue supports their precedence in receiving, transmitting, understanding, and living revelation. It does not mean that every individual in an early generation was sound, nor that every early individual was more knowledgeable than every later scholar.

Fifth, when the Prophet ﷺ warned of extensive disagreement, he directed the Ummah to his Sunnah and the Sunnah of the rightly guided caliphs:

فإنه من يعيش منكم بعدي فسيرى اختلافا كثيرا، فعليكم بسنتي وسنة الخلفاء المهديين
الراشدين، تمسكوا بها وعضوا عليها بالنواجذ، وإياكم ومحدثات الأمور، فإن كل محدثة بدعة،
وكل بدعة ضلالة

"Whoever among you lives after me will see much disagreement. Therefore, adhere to my Sunnah and the Sunnah of the rightly guided caliphs. Hold firmly to it and bite onto it with the molar teeth. Beware of newly introduced matters, for every newly introduced matter is an innovation, and every innovation is misguidance."

Source and authenticity: Sunan Abi Dawud, no. 4607. Also reported by al-Tirmidhi, no. 2676, who said, "hasan sahih." Authentic.

The Prophetic remedy is not unrestricted attachment to later novelty. It is adherence to transmitted guidance. Yet this does not turn every isolated judgment of every caliph or Companion into independent revelation. The collective way, established consensus, transmitted explanation, and sound methodology must be distinguished from individual fallible ijtihad.

4. Salafiyyah Is Complete Ittiba'

Allah said:

قل إن كنتم تحبون الله فاتبعوني يحببكم الله ويغفر لكم ذنوبكم والله غفور رحيم

"Say: If you love Allah, then follow me; Allah will love you and forgive your sins. Allah is Forgiving, Merciful."

Source: Qur'an, Al Imran 3:31.

Allah also said:

وَأَنْ هَذَا صِرَاطِي مُسْتَقِيمًا فَاتَّبِعُوهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا السُّبُلَ فَتَفَرَّقَ بِكُمْ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ

"This is My straight path, so follow it; do not follow the other paths, for they will separate you from His path."

Source: Qur'an, al-An'am 6:153.

Salafiyyah, as used in this article, does not add a new religion to Islam. It identifies commitment to receiving and following Islam through revelation and the inherited way of the earliest praised generations. It is not merely a cultural identity, factional membership, social circle, or public label.

Its reality includes the entire religion:

- Tawhid and iman;
- sound creed;
- Sunnah and ittiba';
- prayer, fasting, zakah, pilgrimage, and every act of worship;
- Qur'an, tafsir, and hadith;
- fiqh, usul al-fiqh, and lawful conduct;
- Arabic and the tools of understanding;
- sincerity, repentance, patience, humility, justice, and good manners;
- family and social duties;
- and da'wah upon knowledge and insight.

A person is not defined by knowing only whom to criticize. Warning against fabricated reports, false interpretations, innovations, and harmful claims is part of protecting revelation when it is undertaken with knowledge, justice, need, and benefit. The imams of hadith criticized unreliable narrators; jurists corrected legal error; scholars refuted innovations and defended the Sunnah.

But refutation serves the religion; it does not replace the religion. A Muslim who spends his attention on controversies while neglecting Tawhid, prayer, Qur'an, fiqh, sincerity, parents, family rights, lawful work, humility, and good character has not entered the breadth of the inherited path. Necessary criticism must remain proportionate. It is not a license for constant dispute, suspicion, public self-display, or unqualified judgment upon particular people.

The movement required is therefore positive: from standing outside error to entering the world of transmitted knowledge, worship, and conduct.

5. Entering the World of the Salaf

The early Muslims learned revelation as guidance to be believed and lived. Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud رضي الله عنه said:

كَانَ الرَّجُلُ مِمَّنْ إِذَا تَعَلَّمَ عَشْرَ آيَاتٍ لَمْ يَجَاوِزْهُنَّ حَتَّى يَعْرِفَ مَعَانِيَهُنَّ وَالْعَمَلَ بِهِنَّ

"When a man among us learned ten verses, he would not move beyond them until he knew their meanings and acted upon them."

Source and status: Al-Tabari, *Jami' al-Bayan*, report no. 81; also al-Tahawi, *Sharh Mushkil al-Athar*, no. 1450, and al-Hakim, no. 2047, with slight variation. Shu'ayb al-Arna'ut graded its chain authentic and explained that its meaning reports their learning under the Prophet ﷺ.

The report presents a representative method, not a universal rule that every learner must stop after exactly ten verses. Its point is the union of wording, meaning, and action.

Jundub ibn Abd Allah رضي الله عنه similarly said:

كنا مع النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم ونحن فتیان حزاورة، فتعلمنا الإيمان قبل أن نتعلم القرآن، ثم تعلمنا القرآن فزددنا به إيماناً

"We were with the Prophet ﷺ as strong young men. We learned faith before we learned the Qur'an; then we learned the Qur'an and increased in faith through it."

Source and authenticity: Sunan Ibn Majah, no. 61; graded authentic by al-Albani in *Sahih Ibn Majah*, no. 52.

The inherited world of the Salaf therefore joins:

- receiving authentic texts;
- learning their meanings;
- believing what they establish;
- knowing lawful and unlawful matters;
- distinguishing sound reports from unsound ones;
- acting upon knowledge;
- fearing speech without knowledge;
- worshipping Allah with sincerity;
- and transmitting the religion carefully.

The scholars who preserve this inheritance occupy an honored role. The Prophet ﷺ said:

وإن العلماء ورثة الأنبياء، وإن الأنبياء لم يورثوا دينارا ولا درهما، ورثوا العلم، فمن أخذه أخذ بحظ وافر

"The scholars are the heirs of the Prophets. The Prophets did not leave behind a dinar or dirham; they left knowledge. Whoever takes it has taken an abundant share."

Source and grading: Sunan Abi Dawud, no. 3641; also al-Tirmidhi, no. 2682, and Ibn Majah, no. 223. Graded authentic by al-Albani. The wording above follows Abu Dawud.

Inheritance here is inheritance of knowledge, not Prophethood or independent legislative authority. Scholars preserve the texts, compare narrations, explain difficult language, reconcile evidences, derive rulings, teach, and apply general principles to circumstances.

Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali summarized beneficial knowledge:

فالعالم النافع من هذه العلوم كلها ضبط نصوص الكتاب والسنة وفهم معانيها، والتقييد في ذلك بالمأثور عن الصحابة والتابعين وتابعيهم في معاني القرآن والحديث، وفيما ورد عنهم من الكلام في مسائل الحلال والحرام والزهد والرقائق والمعارف وغير ذلك، والاجتهاد على تمييز صحيحه من سقيمه أولاً، ثم الاجتهاد على الوقوف على معانيه وتفهمه ثانياً، وفي ذلك كفاية لمن عقل، وشغل لمن بالعلم النافع عني واشتغل

"Beneficial knowledge in all these disciplines is to preserve the texts of the Book and Sunnah and understand their meanings; to adhere in that to what is transmitted from the Companions, the Followers, and their followers concerning the meanings of the Qur'an and hadith, and concerning what is reported from them about lawful and unlawful matters, renunciation, softening of the hearts, spiritual knowledge, and other subjects; first striving to distinguish what is sound from what is unsound, and then striving to grasp and understand its meanings. In this is sufficiency for one who understands and enough occupation for one who concerns himself with beneficial knowledge."

Source: Ibn Rajab, *Fadl Ilm al-Salaf ala Ilm al-Khalaf*, study and verification by Abu Mus'ab Tal'at ibn Fu'ad al-Halwani, al-Faruq al-Hadithah, first edition, 1425 AH/2004, p. 26.

This definition is expansive. It includes creed, tafsir, hadith, fiqh, lawful and unlawful matters, zuhd, softening of the heart, authentication, meaning, and action. It shows why the inherited path cannot be reduced to a slogan or one narrow field.

6. Tafsir and Hadith: Preserving Revelation and Its Meaning

Two connected responsibilities must remain distinct: preservation of transmission and preservation of meaning.

Tafsir explains the intended meanings of the Qur'an through a disciplined hierarchy. Ibn Taymiyyah said:

إن أصح الطرق في ذلك أن يفسر القرآن بالقرآن، فما أجمل في مكان فإنه قد فسر في موضع آخر، وما اختصر من مكان فقد بسط في موضع آخر، فإن أعيانك ذلك فعليك بالسنة، فإنها شارحة للقرآن وموضحة له

"The soundest method in this is that the Qur'an be explained by the Qur'an. What is summarized in one place is explained elsewhere, and what is abbreviated in one place is expanded elsewhere. If that does not suffice, then refer to the Sunnah, for it explains and clarifies the Qur'an."

Source: Ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah fi Usul al-Tafsir*, Dar Maktabat al-Hayah, Beirut, 1980, p. 39.

For the present gateway article, the principal order is:

1. the Qur'an explaining the Qur'an;
2. the authentic Sunnah explaining the Qur'an;
3. the explanations of the Sahabah;
4. the explanations of the Tabi'in, especially where transmitted and supported;
5. Arabic, context, occasions of revelation, recitations, and established interpretive principles;
6. reliable tafsir scholarship that gathers and weighs these sources.

This order does not mean that every report in a tafsir book is authentic. Nor does it mean that every difference among the Salaf is a contradiction. Some differences are differences of wording or complementary examples; others are genuine and require weighing. Arabic possibility alone is not proof that a proposed meaning was intended.

Hadith science serves the Sunnah through another disciplined system: memorization, writing, isnad, biographical criticism, comparison of routes and wordings, identification of hidden defects, classification of reports, and juristic understanding.

Abd Allah ibn al-Mubarak رحمه الله said:

الإِسْنَادُ مِنَ الدِّينِ، وَلَوْ لَا الإِسْنَادُ لَقَالَ مَنْ شَاءَ مَا شَاءَ

"The chain of transmission is part of the religion. Were it not for the chain, whoever wished would say whatever he wished."

Source: Sahih Muslim, *Muqaddimah*, chapter concerning the isnad being part of the religion. This is a statement of an early imam, not a Prophetic hadith.

An attributed saying does not become proof merely because it circulates online, appears in a book, or agrees with a sound general meaning. Authenticity and interpretation are separate tasks. A sound report may be misunderstood; a weak report may express a meaning established elsewhere; and a weak report is not automatically fabricated.

The student therefore asks two questions: is this wording established, and what does it mean in its context? Tafsir protects intended meaning; hadith criticism protects attribution. Both serve revelation and must operate together.

7. Fiqh, Usul, Legal Maxims, and Arabic

The inherited sciences are not competing religions. They are specialized tools serving one revelation.

For the limited orientation required here:

- **Fiqh** identifies and organizes practical Shar'i rulings.
- **Usul al-fiqh** studies the evidences and rules by which rulings are derived, reconciled, and weighed.
- **Qawa'id fiqhiyyah**, or legal maxims, are broad juristic formulations that gather recurring patterns across many subsidiary rulings.

A legal maxim generally arises through induction and may have exceptions. It cannot override an explicit proof. Usul does not authorize speculation detached from revelation; it disciplines the process of derivation. Fiqh is not mere personal opinion; it is the juristic effort to know and apply Allah's ruling.

Arabic is also a central means of access. Allah said:

إنا أنزلناه قرآنًا عربيًا لعلكم تعقلون

"We sent it down as an Arabic Qur'an so that you may understand."

Source: Qur'an, Yusuf 12:2.

Ibn Taymiyyah said:

وأيضاً فإن نفس اللغة العربية من الدين، ومعرفة فرض واجب، فإن فهم الكتاب والسنة فرض، ولا يفهم إلا بفهم اللغة العربية، وما لا يتم الواجب إلا به فهو واجب. ثم منها ما هو واجب على الأعيان، ومنها ما هو واجب على الكفاية

"The Arabic language itself is from the religion, and knowing it is an obligatory duty, because understanding the Book and Sunnah is obligatory, and they are not understood except through understanding Arabic. Whatever an obligation cannot be completed without is itself obligatory. Some of this is an individual obligation and some is a communal obligation."

Source: Ibn Taymiyyah, *Iqtida' al-Sirat al-Mustaqim li-Mukhalafat Ashab al-Jahim*, ed. Nasir Abd al-Karim al-Aql, Dar Alam al-Kutub, Beirut, seventh edition, 1419 AH/1999, vol. 1, p. 527.

The necessary qualification is contained in the quotation itself: duties differ. Every Muslim must learn the knowledge required for correct belief, worship, and the obligations arising from his circumstances. A serious student of knowledge should progressively strengthen Arabic because direct access to Qur'anic wording, hadith, tafsir, fiqh terminology, and the books of scholars depends upon it. Advanced linguistic preservation and specialization are communal duties carried by qualified students and scholars.

This does not mean that a new Muslim must become an advanced grammarian before benefiting from Islam. Reliable scholars, teachers, and verified translations convey sound basic guidance while the learner develops. A translation communicates meaning but is not identical to the revealed Arabic wording. Likewise, Arabic fluency is a tool, not an automatic certificate of sound creed, evidence, sincerity, or qualification for fatwa and hadith criticism.

Imam al-Shafi'i رحمه الله distinguished general knowledge required of every accountable Muslim from specialist knowledge:

العلم علمان: علم عامة لا يسع بالغا غير مغلوب على عقله جهله

"Knowledge is of two kinds. One is general knowledge that no accountable adult of sound mind is permitted to be ignorant of."

Source: Al-Shafi'i, *al-Risalah*, ed. Ahmad Muhammad Shakir, Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi wa-Awladuh, Egypt, first edition, 1357 AH/1938, p. 357, paragraph no. 961.

What is individually required expands with circumstances. A trader needs the rulings governing his transactions. A spouse needs marital rights and duties. A parent needs the knowledge required to care for and teach a family. A caller needs to know what he conveys. Specialist disciplines remain a communal responsibility, but the distinction is never a license for permanent ignorance of Tawhid, prayer, basic lawful and unlawful matters, or one's immediate obligations.

8. Knowledge Must Become Worship, Purification, and Character

The Salaf did not seek knowledge as an academic identity detached from servitude to Allah. Beneficial understanding should reform the heart, tongue, and limbs.

Allah said:

إنما يخشى الله من عباده العلماء

"Only those of His servants who possess knowledge truly fear Allah."

Source: Qur'an, Fatir 35:28.

The verse establishes the proper fruit of knowledge: greater knowledge of Allah's greatness, power, knowledge, Names, Attributes, commands, and warnings produces greater khashyah. It does not declare every person who possesses information infallible or equally complete in this fruit.

The Prophet ﷺ supplicated:

اللهم إني أعوذ بك من علم لا ينفع

"O Allah, I seek refuge in You from knowledge that does not benefit."

Source and authenticity: Sahih Muslim, no. 2722. Authentic.

Beneficial knowledge should produce:

- Tawhid, iman, and certainty;
- sincerity and watchfulness;
- love, fear, hope, reliance, and repentance;
- correct prayer and obedience;
- humility before the proof;
- patience and justice;
- truthful and careful speech;
- good manners with teachers, students, family, and the public;
- and da'wah upon knowledge rather than impulse.

Knowledge may also increase accountability. The Prophet ﷺ said:

والقرآن حجة لك أو عليك

"The Qur'an is a proof for you or against you."

Source and authenticity: Sahih Muslim, no. 223. Authentic.

Recitation, memorization, teaching, or quotation benefits when joined to faith and obedience. The same revelation may testify against one who knowingly abandons or contradicts it. This does not mean that every failure erases every benefit of a person's knowledge. It means that carrying revelation creates responsibility.

Knowledge also disciplines speech. The learner distinguishes what he knows from what he does not know, an explicit text from an inference, certainty from probability, and general criticism from judgment upon a particular person. He does not hide a clear proof to protect his ego, nor does he pronounce judgments beyond his competence.

Da'wah is likewise governed by understanding. Allah said:

قل هذه سبيلي أدعو إلى الله على بصيرة أنا ومن اتبعني وسبحان الله وما أنا من المشركين

"Say: This is my way. I call to Allah upon clear insight - I and those who follow me. Glory be to Allah, and I am not among the polytheists."

Source: Qur'an, Yusuf 12:108.

Basirah is clear knowledge, not unsupported intuition. The caller calls to Allah, not to personal reputation or factional loyalty. A Muslim may convey a basic matter he knows with certainty, while technical rulings and disputed questions require greater qualification. Zeal cannot replace evidence, and knowledge cannot be separated from wisdom, justice, and sincere intention.

9. Necessary Boundaries and Scholarly Disagreement

Following the Salaf requires precision. It does not make every individual scholar infallible.

The Prophet ﷺ said:

إذا حكم الحاكم فاجتهد ثم أصاب فله أجران، وإذا حكم فاجتهد ثم أخطأ فله أجر

"When a judge rules and strives to reach the correct judgment, then is correct, he has two rewards; and when he rules and strives, then errs, he has one reward."

Source and authenticity: Sahih al-Bukhari, no. 7352; Sahih Muslim, no. 1716a. Authentic and agreed upon.

The hadith concerns a qualified judge or mujtahid. It establishes that sincere qualified effort may reach the correct ruling or err. The reward for ijtihad does not make the error correct, and the existence of error does not remove the scholar's dignity.

Several distinctions must therefore remain fixed.

Revelation and scholarly explanation: The Qur'an and authentic Sunnah are binding revelation. Scholars explain, derive, reconcile, and apply; their statements are not equal to revelation.

Consensus and individual opinion: When a genuine consensus of qualified Muslim scholars is established, it is authoritative. Yet the claim "there is consensus" requires verification. A majority, one school's agreement, silence known to one researcher, or an isolated Companion report is not automatically ijma'.

The collective path and isolated attributions: The inherited methodology, established consensus, and transmitted explanations of the Salaf govern understanding. An isolated opinion attributed to an early person must still be authenticated, contextualized, and classified.

Recognized disagreement and opposition to revelation: Qualified scholars may differ concerning authenticity, indication, reconciliation, generality, specificity, analogy, circumstances, or application. Such disagreement is not automatically innovation. At the same time, the existence of disagreement does not make every position equally correct or permissible to select according to desire.

Following evidence and blind partisanship: Respect for an imam does not authorize rejecting a stronger proof merely to defend a school or personality. Conversely, the slogan "I follow evidence" does not qualify an untrained person to ignore the scholars, choose whichever opinion suits him, or perform independent hadith criticism.

Early precedence and later scholarship: The Salaf possess unique proximity and comparative virtue. Later scholars nevertheless remain necessary. They preserve manuscripts, gather routes, authenticate reports, explain language, organize technical disciplines, reconcile evidences, address new circumstances, and teach later generations. Their work is assessed by fidelity to revelation and the inherited path, not dismissed merely because it is later.

Allah said:

فاسألوا أهل الذكر إن كنتم لا تعلمون

"Ask the people of knowledge if you do not know."

Source: Qur'an, al-Nahl 16:43, relevant clause.

Returning to revelation is therefore not anti-scholar individualism. It requires benefiting from qualified scholars without treating them as independent legislators or infallible authorities.

Finally, criticism of an error is separate from judgment upon a particular person. A general ruling may be clear while its application to a named individual requires verified facts, competence, justice, conditions, impediments, and the judgments of those qualified to assess the case.

10. From Label to Reality

The practical goal is movement from a claim to a lived inheritance.

A sound path begins with the foundations. Learn Tawhid, the two testimonies, the essentials of iman, and the worship required every day. Study the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah through reliable teachers and books. Build a settled understanding before pursuing every controversy.

Then enter the sciences progressively. Learn how tafsir preserves meaning and how hadith criticism protects attribution. Acquire the fiqh required for worship and circumstances. Learn the basic functions of usul and legal maxims so that evidence is not handled without discipline. Strengthen Arabic steadily, without delaying necessary guidance until fluency and without imagining that fluency alone produces qualification.

Act upon what is learned. Review sincerity. Correct prayer and obedience. Guard the tongue. Fulfill family and social rights. Let knowledge produce humility rather than self-importance. When stronger evidence becomes clear, accept correction. When a matter remains uncertain, say so.

Study with reliable scholars and benefit from verified editions and trustworthy translations. Do not make social media fragments the principal curriculum. Do not confuse access to a database with mastery of a science. Preserve exact quotations, but learn their context and evidentiary status.

Call to Allah upon insight. Convey known foundations clearly. Leave specialist judgments to those qualified. Correct error with knowledge, justice, proportion, and benefit. Do not reduce the religion to public refutation, and do not abandon necessary clarification out of fear of criticism.

Above all, remember that understanding is granted by Allah. Study is worship when the intention is sound and the method is correct. The servant asks Allah for beneficial knowledge, seeks the lawful means, acts upon what he learns, and remains humble because every increase in knowledge reveals the extent of what he does not know.

The aim is not merely to say, "I follow the Salaf." It is to receive the religion through their inherited path: revelation before opinion, authentic transmission before unsupported attribution, meaning joined to wording, knowledge joined to action, worship joined to sincerity, scholarship joined to humility, and da'wah joined to insight.

Conclusion

Understanding the religion is an Allah-given fiqh of revelation. It is broader than information, memory, books, labels, and debate. It includes correct belief, worship, commands and prohibitions, evidences, priorities, and application.

The Qur'an and authentic Sunnah possess intended meanings. The Messenger ﷺ recited, taught, explained, purified, and embodied the revelation. The Sahabah received it directly, and the earliest praised generations transmitted and applied it with unique proximity. Allah praised those who follow the first believers with excellence, and the Prophet ﷺ testified to the virtue of the first three generations and commanded adherence to his Sunnah and the Sunnah of the rightly guided caliphs amid disagreement.

Following this inherited way does not make every individual infallible. Revelation remains above every scholar. Established consensus is distinguished from majority and individual opinion. Recognized ijtiḥād is distinguished from opposition to explicit proof. Later scholars remain indispensable as preservers and explainers when they faithfully serve the inherited path.

The Islamic sciences protect different parts of the same trust. Tafsir preserves intended meaning. Ḥadīth criticism protects attribution. Fiqh identifies practical rulings. Usul governs derivation. Legal maxims organize recurring patterns. Arabic deepens access to revelation. None of these sciences is sought as an identity detached from worship.

Beneficial knowledge produces khashyah, sincerity, repentance, obedience, justice, careful speech, good character, and da'wah upon insight. The Qur'an may be a proof for its possessor or against him. Therefore, the final measure is not how much information a person can display, but whether he receives the truth correctly, submits to it, acts upon it, and remains humble and correctable.

Whoever Allah intends good for, He grants him understanding of the religion. The servant seeks that gift through revelation, the inherited way of the Salaf, reliable scholarship, disciplined study, sincere worship, and action.

REVIEW AND APPLICATION

Remember

1. Understanding the religion is an Allah-given *fiqh* of revelation, not information alone.
2. The Qur'an and authentic Sunnah are understood through Prophetic explanation and the inherited way of the Sahabah and the praised early generations.
3. Following the Salaf does not make every individual scholar infallible or turn scholarly statements into revelation.
4. Tafsir, hadith, *fiqh*, *usul*, legal maxims, and Arabic serve connected functions in preserving and applying the religion.
5. Beneficial knowledge must become faith, worship, action, character, and da'wah upon insight.

Test Yourself

1. What does *fiqh in the religion* include beyond the later technical science of practical rulings?
2. Why does commanded reflection upon the Qur'an not authorize unrestricted personal interpretation?
3. What evidence establishes the virtue of following the earliest believers and the first three generations?
4. How do tafsir and hadith science protect two distinct aspects of revelation?
5. What is the difference between established consensus, a majority position, and an individual scholarly opinion?
6. Why are later scholars still necessary while the Salaf retain precedence?
7. What fruits should beneficial knowledge produce in the heart, tongue, and limbs?

Apply

Choose one foundational subject you are presently studying. Record:

- the primary Qur'anic or authentic Prophetic proof;
- the explanation transmitted from the Sahabah or early Salaf, where available;
- the reliable scholarly explanation you are using;
- one action, correction, or act of worship that should result from the knowledge;
- and one point that remains uncertain and requires further verification.

Continue**Next foundational study: When Opinions Overcome Revelation**

That article examines how desire, inherited assumptions, speculative interpretation, ideology, and personal opinion may be placed over revealed evidence, and how submission to revelation protects the Muslim's understanding.