

Imaam Ibnul-Qayyim On Following A Madhhab

Taken from: I'laamul-Muwaqqi'een (4/261)

[Q]: Does the common person have to follow one of the well-known Madhhab's or not?

[A]: There are two sayings regarding this:

That it is not obligatory upon him and this is what is correct and definite since there is nothing obligatory except what Allaah, the Most High, and His Messenger have made obligatory. Neither Allaah nor His Messenger made it obligatory to follow the school of thought (Madhhab) of any person from the Ummah and to follow him alone in the Religion. The best generations passed by without anyone doing this. Indeed the common person cannot have a Madhhab, even if he thinks that he does, since the common person has no Madhhab at all. This is because the Madhhab will be either for the one who is able to research to a certain level and understand evidence and also know about the other Madhhab's or for the one who has read a book concerning the details of that Madhhab and knows the ruling and sayings of his Imaam.

As for the one who is unable to do any of that but merely says: "I am a Shaafi'ee" or "I am Hanbali" etc., then he does not become that just by saying so, just as would be the case if he said: "I am a religious scholar" or "I am a scholar of grammar" or "I am a writer" then he does not become that just by saying so. This is further clarified by the fact that the one who says: "I am a Shaafi'ee or a Maaliki or a Hanafi" claiming that he follows that Imaam and his way, would only be truthful if he were to follow his way in acquiring knowledge, understanding and extraction of proof. As for this one, with his ignorance and being far from the manners of the Imaam and his knowledge and way, how can it be correct for him to ascribe himself to him except with mere claims and empty words having no meaning?! How can the common person have a Madhhab? Even if it could be imagined, it would still not be obligatory upon him or anyone else to ever have to follow the Madhhab of a certain man from the Ummah, to the extent that he accepts all his sayings and rejects everyone else's sayings.

This is a filthy innovation introduced into the Ummah.

No scholar of Islaam has ever said this and they are higher in station and better knowing about Allaah than to order the people about this. Even further from the truth is the saying of those who say that he must stick to the Madhhab of a single scholar and further still from the truth is the one who says, he must follow one of the four Madhhab's! O Allaah, how strange!

(Is it that) the Madhhab's of the Companions of Allaah's Messenger (sall-Allaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) died out and those of the Taabi'een and those who came after them and those of the rest of the scholars of Islaam and all have been invalidated except for the Madhhab's of four men only from amongst all the rest of the scholars and Imaams?!

Rather, that which Allaah, the Most High, and His Messenger (sall-Allaahu 'alayhi wa sallam) made obligatory upon the Companions, the Taabi'een and those who came after them is the same as that which He made obligatory upon those after

them until the Day of Resurrection. That which is obligatory does not vary or change, even though how it is achieved may vary or the amount which is

obligatory may vary due to varying ability or inability, time, place and condition, but that also follows what Allaah and His Messenger have obligated.

Those who say that it is correct for the common person to have a Madhhab claim:

“Because he believes that the Madhhab which he ascribes himself to is the truth, therefore, he must be sincere to his belief.”

If this saying of theirs were true then it would mean that it is forbidden to seek a ruling from anyone other than the people of his own Madhhab and likewise that it is forbidden to take the Madhhab of anyone equal or greater than his own Imaam and would mean other things which all show the falsity of the belief in the first place. Indeed it would mean that if he saw a text from Allaah's Messenger (sall-Allaahu `alayhi wa sallam) or a saying from the four Caliphs with other than his own Imaam, he would have to abandon the text and the sayings of the Companions and give precedence to the saying of his own Imaam.

Rather, he should seek from whom he wishes from the followers of the four Madhhab's and others besides them. It is not obligatory upon him or upon the one who delivers verdicts (mufti) to limit himself to one of the four Imaams. Upon this is the consensus of the Ummah, just as it is not obligatory upon the scholar to restrict himself to the hadeeth's reported by the people of his land or any land in particular, rather, if any hadeeth is authentic it is obligatory to act upon it, whether it is reported of the people of the Hijaz, Iraq, Shaam, Egypt or Yemen.