

# بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

## WHY THE MEANS TO FIRM FAITH IS OF LITTLE IMPORTANCE

Imām “The Proof of Islām” Al-Ghazzālī<sup>1</sup>

*Translated by Ustādh ‘Abdullāh bin Ḥamīd ‘Alī*

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### SECTION 5: [Why the Means to Firm Faith is of Little Importance]

Maybe you will say, “I do not deny that firm conviction occurs in the hearts of laypersons by reason of these things, but there is not a speck of spiritual cognizance found in that approach. People have been burdened with attaining true spiritual cognizance, not mere belief that is equivalent to ignorance wherein falsehood is not distinguished from truth.” [To this] the response would be that this is an error by the one who holds this view. Rather, the happiness of the creation in believing unshakably in something according to how it really is, so that their hearts would be engraved with the image of that which is in conformity with the true nature of truth, so that when they would die, when what is concealed from them is exposed and they have witnessed matters as they believed they were, they will not be disgraced and scorched firstly by the fire of humiliation and shame, and secondly by the fire of Hell. When the image of the truth is engraved and impressed on his heart, then there is no reason to look at the cause that produced it whether it be from evidence that is direct, illustrative (*rasmi*), convincing, an acceptance of the belief based on [how one views] the one who says it, or an acceptance

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpt from ‘A Return to Purity in Creed’ (*Iljām al-‘Awām ‘an ‘Ilm al-Kalām*) by Imām Abu Hamid al-Ghazzālī; translated by *Ustadh ‘Abdullāh b. Ḥamīd ‘Alī*; published by Lamppost Productions (2008).

premised merely on blind uncritical imitation without a cause. What is sought is not the evidence that realizes the resulting benefit, it is the benefit itself. It is to know the reality of the truth as it really is, so whoever believes in the reality of the truth with regard to Allah, His attributes, His books, His messengers, and the Last Day as they really are, then he is happy and fortunate, even if that does not happen with polemical theological and detailed illustrative evidence. Allah did not burden His slaves with any more than that. That is known immediately, without deep reflection, by the sum total of indisputable reports from Allah's messenger ﷺ regarding the Bedouin Arabs who came to him, his offer to them to accept the faith, their acceptance of that, and their departure back to tend to their camels and livestock without burdening them with reflecting on the miracle, the basis of what it indicates, reflection upon talk about the [nature of the] world and the establishment of the Creator, upon the proofs of [His] oneness, and the rest of the attributes.

Rather, if the majority of the uncivilized Arabs were burdened with that, they would not understand, and they would only grasp it after a long period of time had passed. As a matter of fact, one of them would ask him to swear by saying, "By Allah!, did Allah really send you as a messenger?" And he would say, "By Allah!, Allah really sent me as a messenger." One would believe him by his oath, and then leave, and another would say upon meeting him and looking at him, "By Allah! This is not the face of a liar."<sup>2</sup>—and the likes of that are innumerable.

Rather, thousands would accept Islam during the time of his Companions in a single battle, and most of them did not understand the proofs of polemical theology. Those who did understand it were required to abandon their craft and travel frequent to learn for an extended period of time—and nothing of that has ever been reported.

So it is known immediately without reflection that Allah ﷻ has only burdened the creation with having faith and firmly affirming what He said regardless of how the conviction comes about.

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<sup>2</sup> This is like the statement of 'Abd Allāh ibn Sallām, "When the Messenger of Allah ﷺ arrived to Medina, the people rushed to receive him. And I came to him and when I looked at him, I knew that his face was not the face of a liar. The first thing I heard him say was: 'O People! Spread peace, keep ties of kinship, be generous with food, and pray at night when the people are asleep.'" (*Muṣannaf Ibn Abū Shayba*: 5/217)

Yes! There is no denying that the one with [deep] spiritual knowledge has a grade over the blind follower. However, the one who blindly follows in truth is [still] a believer in the same way that one with spiritual knowledge is a believer. So if you say, “Then how can the blind follower distinguish between himself and the blind following Jew?” We would say [that] the blind follower does not know of blind following, and he does not know that he is a blind follower. Rather, he believes within himself that he is of true faith and spiritual cognizance. He does not have doubt about the thing he believes in, and he has no need within himself to make such a distinction, since he is certain that his opponent is upon falsehood and he is upon truth. And he may even manifest his conviction through contexts and clear proofs even if they are not strong. He sees himself as having a special quality because of them (i.e. the proofs) and distinguished by them from his opponents.

So if the Jew happens to believe within himself the same thing, then that belief of his will not cause any confusion to the one who is upon truth, just as the one with spiritual knowledge who is observant claims that he distinguishes himself from the Jew with evidence. The Jewish theologian who is observant also claims that he is distinguished from you by evidence, but his claiming produces no doubt to the observant person with spiritual knowledge, just as it does not make the confident blind follower doubt.

Presenting his own words against the words of the one on falsehood is enough for a faithful one to keep him from being shaken in his faith. Have you ever seen a layperson who became depressed and sad to the point that it becomes difficult for him to distinguish between his own blind following and the blind following of a Jew? Nay, such a thing does not appear in the mind of a layperson. If it did appear to their minds, and they were made to realize it, they would laugh at the one who says it and say, “What is the meaning of this raving?” Or truth and falsehood would be equivalent to him to the point that he would need [to know] the difference [and he would say], “Distinguish how he is on falsehood and that I am on the truth. And I am certain of that, with no doubt about it. So how could I seek out the difference when the difference is known without equivocation, without even searching?”

So this is the state of the blind followers who are certain. This is a problem that does not occur to the Jew who is upon falsehood, since he is certain of his view within himself. So how could it occur to the Muslim blind-follower whose creed conforms to what is the truth with Allah ﷻ? So it becomes clear by this, without equivocation, that their beliefs are firm and that the Divinely revealed law did not burden them with anything other than that.

Then if it is said, “Let us presume that there is an adamant disputatious layperson who does not blindly follow, and the proofs of the Qur’ān and the vivid and convincing declarations that race to [peoples’] understandings do not convince him. What are we to do with him?” We would say [that] this one is sick. His nature inclines toward the health of the primordial disposition and the safety of the original human state, so we will look into his comprehensive qualities. If we find that importunity and disputation overwhelms his nature, we will not dispute with him, and we will purify the face of the Earth from him if he happens to deny to us one of the tenets of faith. If we perceive in him through spiritual intuitiveness (*firāsa*) the signs of maturity and acceptance in such a manner that we can pass with him beyond literal speech into a finer and deeper discussion and look into the proofs, we will treat him with whatever we are able to of those [remedies]. We will medicate him with bitter tasting dispute and sweet tasting proof, and as a whole we will be diligent in disputing with him in the best way as Allah ﷻ has ordered us to do. The license we have in that degree of medicating does not indicate the opening of the door to polemical theology with all people. For, surely medications are [only] used with respect to the sick—and they are the few. What the sick is treated with by reason of necessity, the healthy is to be protected from. The original healthy primordial nature is [always] prepared to accept faith without any argument or exposition of the realities of proofs, and the harm in using the medicine with healthy folk is not less harmful than in neglecting to medicate the sick. So let everything be put in its proper place as Allah ﷻ ordered his Prophet ﷺ when He said, “*Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching. And dispute with them with that which is better.*” So the one invited with wisdom to the truth is one group of people, those [invited] with beautiful preaching is another group of people, and those [invited] with argumentation that is better is yet another group of people—in the manner we explained their divisions in *Kitāb al-Qisṭās al-Mustaqīm*, so we will not take up time repeating it.

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And *Kitāb Ijām al-‘Awāmm ‘an ‘Ilm al-Kalām* is here concluded, the last of the general works of Imam “The Proof of Islām” Al-Ghazzālī. He finished it at the beginning of *Jamādā al-Ākhira* in the year 505. Its scribe finished transcribing it midway through the month of *Sha‘bān* in the year 507.

The Treatise is Complete

