What is Salafiyyah? Shaykh Muhammad Nāsir ud-Deen Al-Albānī

- Translation transcribed from SunnahPublishing -

Questioner: Some of the Salafi brothers have heard about the Dawat as-Salafiyyah and they have heard what has been written about it from its adversaries, not from its followers and du’at (callers). So we hope from your eminence - and you are from the du’at and Scholars of Salafiyyah - for the position of Salafiyyah towards the Islāmic groups today.

Shaykh Al-Albānī: I have answered the likes of that question more than once. However, the answer is a must since the question has been posed. I will speak a word of truth that no Muslim is able to dispute after the reality has been clarified to him.

Firstly, ad-Dawat as-Salafiyyah is an ascription to what? As-Salafiyyah is an ascription to the Salaf. So, it is obligatory upon us to know who the Salaf are when the Scholars of the Muslims refer to the Salaf. Subsequently, you must understand this ascription and what is its significance with regards to its meaning and its indication. The Salaf were the people of the first three generations whom the Messenger - Sallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam - of Allāh testified to their goodness in the authentic Hadīth al-Mutawātir (the authentic concurrent Hadith) which has been collected in the Sahīh-hain and in other than them from a group of the Companions from the Prophet - Sallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam - that he said: "The best of people are my generation, then those who follow them, then those who follow them." These are the first three generations from whom the Messenger - Sallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam - of Allāh testified for their goodness. So as-Salafiyyah is an ascription to these Salaf. And the Salafiyoon ascribe themselves to these Salaf.

Once we have come to know the meaning of the Salaf and as-Salafiyyah at that point I will speak of two affairs. The first affair is that this ascription is not an ascription to an individual or a group of individuals as is the case with the ascriptions to the other groups that are present in the Islāmic lands today. This is not an ascription to an individual nor is it an ascription to tens of individuals rather this ascription is an ascription to infallibility that is because it is impossible for the Salaf us-Salih (pious predecessors) to unite upon misguidance. And this is not the case with the khalaf (the late comers). The Sharī’ah has not come with the praise of the khalaf rather it has come with the dispraise of the great majority of them. And that occurs in the completion of the previous Hadīth where the Prophet - Sallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam - said, "...Then there will come after them a people who will testify when they have not been asked to testify..." to the end of the Hadīth.

Likewise the Prophet - Alayhis Salām - has alluded to that in another Hadīth. It contains praise for a group of the Muslims and dispraises the great majority of them. According to the understanding of the Hadīth where the Prophet - Alayhis Salām - said, "There will not cease to be a group from my Ummah apparent upon the truth. They will not be harmed by those who oppose them until the command of Allāh comes." Or "...up until the Hour is established." This Hadith specifies praise for a group in the later times and a Tā’ifah is a small group, so in the Arabic language it refers to an individual and whatever is above that.

Therefore, once we have come to know that this is the meaning of as-Salafiyyah and that it is an ascription to the Jamā’ah of the Salaf us-Salih (Pious Predecessors) since the Muslim who holds onto what the Salaf us-Salih were upon then he will be infallible in that. Then at this point the second affair comes which I have pointed out previously.

That point is that every Muslim will know this ascription at this point and what it aims to achieve from infallibility. So, it is impossible for the Muslim after this knowledge and this clarification - I do not say to free himself since that would be an unexpected affair - However I say it is impossible for
him to be anything other than Salafi because we have understood that the ascription to Salafiyah means an ascription to that which is infallible.

From where have we taken this infallibility? We have taken it form a Hadith which some of the khalaf use as a proof in a manner that opposes the truth. They use it as a proof for the argument of taking from the late comers (khalaf) by taking what the great majority of the khalaf are upon. So, they bring the Hadith of the Prophet - Alayhis Salâm - where he said, "My Ummah will not unite upon misguidance." It is not possible to apply this Hadith to the current state of the Muslims today. And this affair is known to everyone who has studied the evil current state of affairs.

Attached to that are authentic Hadith which have come to clarify what goes before us from the Jews and Christians and what they fell into and what the Muslims after the Messenger - Alayhis Salâm - will fall into from division. So, the Prophet - Sallallâhu 'alayhi wa sallam - said, "The Jews split up into seventy-one sects and the Christians split up into seventy-two sects, and my Ummah will differ or split up into seventy-three sects, all of them will be in the Fire except for one." They said, "Which one is it O Messenger of Allâh?" He said, "It is the Jamâ'ah." This Jamâ'ah is the Jamâ'a of the Messenger - Alayhis Salâm - and it is entirely possible to apply the previous Hadith, "My Ummah will not unite upon misguidance..." to the Companions since the intended meaning of the Hadith is the Companions or those whom the Messenger of Allâh judged to be the Firqa tun-Nâjja (the Saved Sect) and those who traverse their path and follow their example. So they are the Salaf us-Salih, they are the ones whom our Lord - Azza wa Jal - warned us in the Qur'ân al-Karîm against opposing them and taking a path other than them. Allâh - Azza wa Jal - said, "And whoever opposes the Messenger after guidance has become clear to him and follows other than the path of the Believers We will give him what he has taken and drive him into Hell and evil it is as a destination" (An-Nisâ': 4: 115).

And I have directed the attention of our brothers on many occasions to the wisdom that our Lord - Azza wa Jal - has attached to the verse in His statement: "...and follows other than the path of the Believers." He has attached this to opposing the Messenger - Sallallâhu 'alayhi wa sallam. What is the wisdom behind that? And even if the verse had been mentioned without this phrase, even if it had come as 'whoever opposes the Messenger after guidance has become clear to him We will give him what he has taken and drive him into Hell and evil it is as a destination.' This would have been enough as a warning and a rebuke for the one who opposes the Messenger - Sallallâhu 'alayhi wa sallam - and as a judgement for his outcome to be evil. But, the verse is not like this, it added to the statement of Allâh - Azza wa Jal - "...and follows other than the path of the Believers." Is this unimportant? That is never the case with the Speech of Allâh - Azza wa Jal. It means that whosoever travels upon other than the path of the Companions, who are protected as occurred in our previous words, and they are the Jamâ'ah for whom the Messenger - Alayhis Salâm - testified that they are the Saved Sect, and whoever travels upon their path. It is not permissible for the one who wants to be saved from the punishment on the Day of Judgement to oppose their path. Due to this Allâh, the Most-High said, "And whoever opposes the Messenger after guidance has become clear to him and follows other than the path of the Believers We will give him what he has taken and drive him into Hell and evil it is as a destination" (An-Nisâ': 4: 115).

Therefore, it is upon the Muslims today and in the later times to know two affairs. Firstly, who are the Muslims mentioned in this verse? Then what is the wisdom behind listening to the Qur'ân and the Ahadith of the Messenger - Alayhis Salâm - from him directly? Then they (the Companions) previously achieved the virtue of studying the Messenger's application of the Book and the Sunnah as a knowledge based application. And from the wisdom about which there is a text in the Sunnah is the statement of the Prophet - Alayhis Salâm, "Hearing the information is not like seeing it." And it is from this the poet took his statement, "And the eyewitness is not like the one who heard it."
Therefore, those who did not witness the Messenger - Alayhis Salām - are not like his Companions who witnessed him and heard his speech from him directly and saw the knowledge based application from him. Today you will find a find a modern statement that has inspired some of the modern callers and it is a very beautiful statement but what is more important than saying it is that we make it a current reality.

They say in their lectures and admonishments and in their advices that it is obligatory upon us to make Islām a reality walking upon the Earth. It is a beautiful statement but if we do not understand Islām in light of the understanding of the Salaf us-Salih as we have stated then it is not possible for us to bring this beautiful comprehensive statement into reality to make Islām a current reality walking upon the Earth. The ones who were capable of doing that were the Companions of the Messenger of Allāh due to the two reasons mentioned previously. (1) They heard his speech from him directly so they retained goodness from him. (2) Then there were affairs that required a physical explanation. They would see the Messenger of Allāh explain that physically and I will strike a very clear example for you. There are verses in the Qur’ān al-Karīm that are not possible for the Muslims to understand except if he is familiar with the Sunnah, which explains the Qur’ān al-Karīm. As Allāh - Azza wa Jal - said, 

"...and We reveal to you the Remembrance so that you may explain to the people what has been revealed to them" (An-Nahl: 16: 44). For example, there is the statement of Allāh, the Most-High: "Cut off the hand of the thief male or female..." (Al-Mā'idah: 6: 38). Now bring the Sibawayh (a famous Arabic grammarian) of this era in the Arabic language and let him explain to us this noble verse. And "the thief" who is he? Linguistically he will not be able to determine who the thief is. And "the hand" what is it? The Sibawayh of later times will not be able to give the answer to these two questions: Who is the thief that deserves to have his hand cut off and what is the extent of the hand that must be cut off due to the sin of this thief?

In the Arabic language the thief is the one who steals the value of an egg, so he is the thief. And the hand is this, if you were to cut off the hand from here or here or any place then it is considered the hand. However, the answer is found in the previous verse: 

"...and We reveal to you the Remembrance so that you may explain to the people what has been revealed to them" (An-Nahl: 16: 44). The answer is in the explanation. So there is an explanation from the Messenger - Alayhis Salām - for the Qur’ān. Islām is to put this explanation into action especially in this verse as an example. And there are other verses and how many they are because the one who reads the ilm al-usool he will read in the ilm al-usool that there is a general and specific, there is a restricted and an un-restricted, there is an abrogater and the abrogated. These are general terms under which there are tens of foundations, we can even say hundreds of foundations. There are general texts that have been restricted by the Sunnah.