

Imamah Part 1 — 4:59 and Imamah in General

Introduction

What follows is a basic outline of Imamah and its proofs. In this first part, we will discuss Imamah generally, and in the second part we will show proofs that the Imams of Ahlul Bayt are the correct Imams. The point of this article is not to break any new ground or bring new arguments, but to compile the best arguments we could find in a concise manner. We have provided links to more detailed and competent resources throughout this article, and it is highly recommended to read each of those resources for the best understanding.

As with all of my documents, this will be a living document which will continue to grow and be rewritten and edited over time. We pray that this will be beneficial and that it would have served your purposes.

Imamah

Imamah is an obligation amongst both Sunnis and Shias. **Imamah is the religious position of authority to which obedience is mandatory**, and for Shias it is synonymous with Khilafa in the sense that the Imams of Ahlul Bayt are the rightful Caliphs. It is agreed upon among both Sunnis and Shias that verse 4:59 of the Quran establishes Imamah:

O believers! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority (Ulil Amr) among you. Should you disagree on anything, then refer it to Allah and His Messenger; if you 'truly' believe in Allah and the Last Day. This is the best and fairest resolution. (4:59)

This verse sets up an obligation to obey Ulil Amr—**whoever they may be**. Clearly then, this verse establishes Imamah as defined above because this verse makes it mandatory to obey Ulil Amr, and Imamah is the religious position of authority to which obedience is mandatory.

There are countless Shia hadith discussing this verse's indication of Imamah. The following is a non-exhaustive list of hadith explaining and quoting 4:59 for the purposes of Imamah:

Abu Basir who has said that he asked abu 'Abdallah (a.s) about the following words of Allah, the Most Holy, the Most High. "Believers, obey God, His Messenger, and your leaders (who possess Divine authority). . ." (4:59) The Imam (a.s) said, "This was sent from heavens about Ali ibn abu talib al-Hassan and al-Husayn (a.s)." I then said, "People say, "Why did He not specify Ali and his family by their names in the book of Allah, the Most Holy, the Most High?"' The Imam (a.s) said, "Say to them, 'The command for prayer came to the Messenger of Allah but He has not specified (the number of the Rak'ats) for them three nor four. It, in fact, was the Messenger of Allah who explained to them this matter.¹ The command for Zakat (a form of income tax) came to the Messenger of Allah and there was no specific taxable number such as one Dirham on every forty Dirham. It was the Messenger of Allah who explained it for them. The command for Hajj came to the Messenger of Allah. It did not say walk seven times around the Ka'ba It was the Messenger of Allah who explained it for them. The verse about obedience came "Believers, obey God, His Messenger, and your leaders (who possess Divine authority). . ." (4:59) It came to declare that Ali, al-Hassan and al-Husayn (a.s) were the leaders who possessed Divine authority. The Messenger of Allah then said about Ali (a.s), "man kuntu mawla fa'Aliun mawla." He also has said, "I enjoin you to follow the book of Allah and my family because have prayed to Allah, the Most Holy, the Most High not to separate these two from each other until He will make them arrive al-Kawthar (at the pool of Paradise) to

¹ See Ibn Uthaymeen's comments as translated in [this article](#).

meet me. He has granted my prayer as such” The Holy Prophet (s.a.) has said, “Do not try to teach them (The Imam (a.s) because they are far more knowledgeable than you.” The Holy Prophet (s.a.) has said, “The Imam (a.s) will never take you out of the gate of guidance and they never make you enter the gate of misguidance.” Had the Messenger of Allah remained silent and would not explain anything about his Ahl al-Bayt (family) the family of so and so would have advanced their claim for Imamah (Leadership with Divine Authority). However, Allah, the Most Holy, the Most High, has revealed it in His book to confirm the explanations of His Prophet about Ahl al-Bayt (in the following verse), “People of the house, God wants to remove all kinds of uncleanness from you and to purify you thoroughly.” (33:33)... [\(Al Kafi\)](#) **(It is highly suggested to read this full hadith and internalize the argument presented)**

“I asked Imam abu ‘Abdallah (a.s), ‘Is obedience to the successor (of the holy Prophet) obligatory?’ The Imam (a.s) said, “Yes, it is they about whom Allah, the Most Holy, the Most High, has said, “Believers, obey God, His Messenger, and your (qualified) leaders. . (4:59) It is they about whom Allah, the Most Holy, the Most High, has said, “Only God, His Messenger, and the true believers who are steadfast in prayer and pay alms, while they kneel during prayer, are your guardians (5:55).” [\(Al Kafi\)](#)

‘Isa al-Sariyy who has said the following: “Once I asked abu ‘Abd Allah (a.s) to teach me the principles of Islam in such a way that on holding to them my deeds can take pure and correct form and thereafter the ignorance of whatever I am ignorant of cannot harm me. The Imam said, ‘Of the principles of Islam are to testify and acknowledge that no one deserves to be worshipped except Allah, and that Muhammad (a.s) is the Messenger of Allah. Of such principles is to affirm and acknowledge that whatever he has brought is from Allah, to pay al-Zakat (charity) is a right and that al-Wilayah which Allah, the Most Majestic, the Most Holy, has commanded to accept and acknowledge is al-Wilayah (Divine Authority) of Ahl al-Bayt of Muhammad, recipient of divine supreme covenant. The Messenger of Allah has said, “Whoever dies while he does not know who his Imam is, he is considered as one who has died in the darkness of ignorance.” Allah, the Most Majestic, the Most Holy, has said, “Obey Allah, obey the Messenger of Allah and the persons among you who possess Divine Authority.” (4:59). Imam Ali was there (possessed Divine Authority) and after him were Imam Hassan, Imam Husayn and Ali ibn al-Husayn and after them was Muhammad ibn Ali, recipients of divine supreme covenant, successively and thus it will continue. The land will not take an ideal shape without an Imam. Whoever dies while he does not know who his Imam is, he is considered as one who has died in the darkness of ignorance. What everyone of you will need very urgently when his soul will reach here (pointing to his chest) is to know him (the Imam) so that he can say it is certain that I have been holding to a genuinely good matter.”’ [\(Al Kafi\)](#)

abu Masruq who has said the following: “Once I said to abu ‘Abd Allah (a.s) ‘We speak to people and in support of our (Shi’a Muslim) belief refer them to the words of Allah, the Most Majestic, the Most Holy, ‘O believers, obey Allah, His Messenger, and your leaders (who possess Divine Authority). . .’ (4:59) They say, ‘It applies to the commanders of the missions of armed forces.’ “We then refer them to the words of Allah, the Most Majestic, the Most Holy, ‘Only Allah. His Messenger. and the true believers who are steadfast in prayer and pay alms, while they kneel during prayer, are your guardians.’ (5:55) **(It is highly suggested to read the article “[Imamah in the Quran Ayat al Wilayah](#)” linked in this verse for proofs that this verse demonstrates the Imamah of Imam Ali)** They say, ‘This applies to the believing people (as a whole).’ “We refer them to the words of Allah, the Most Majestic, the Most Holy, (Muhammad), say, “I do not ask you for any payment for my preaching to you except (your) love of (my near) relatives. . . .” (42:23) They say, ‘It applies to the relatives of the Muslims.’ “I (the narrator) then mentioned all such references that I knew of and the Imam said, ‘If such is the case, call them for Al- Mubalah (pleading before Allah for help against the enemy).’ I then asked, ‘How should I do that?’ The Imam said, ‘Correct your soul three days,’ I think he said, ‘Fast, take a shower and both of you go in the mountains, crisscross the fingers of your right hand with his fingers, then yield for justice against yourself (begin with yourself) and say, “O

Lord, the Cherisher of the seven heavens and seven earths, the One who possesses the knowledge of the unseen and seen, the Beneficent, the Merciful, if abu Masruq has denied anyone's rights or has claimed falsehood, send upon him misfortune from the sky or a painful punishment." Then turn it to him and say, 'If so and so has rejected a truth or made a false claim, send upon him a misfortune from the sky or a painful punishment.' Then the Imam said to me, 'You will very shortly see it in him.' The narrator has said, 'I swear by Allah I could not find any creature, who could accept my call for Al-Mubalah (pleading before Allah for help against the enemy).'" (Al Kafi)

The only differences between Sunnis and Shia on this verse are two: (1) What the scope of obedience to Ulil Amr is (2) Who Ulil Amr are. Before discussing these points, we must first explain what the meaning of a clear and unambiguous verse is.

The Meaning of a Clear Verse

The Quran says:

it is He who has sent this Scripture down to you [Prophet]. Some of its verses are definite in meaning (مُحْكَمَاتٌ) - these are the cornerstone of the Scripture- and others are ambiguous (مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ). The perverse at heart eagerly pursue the ambiguities in their attempt to make trouble and to pin down a specific meaning of their own: no one knows their true meaning except for God and Those firmly grounded in knowledge. Say, 'We believe in it: it is all from our Lord' - only those with real perception will take heed.² (3:7)

This verse establishes that there are clear (muhkam) and ambiguous (mutashabih) verses of the Quran. Then the verse warns us against acting on ambiguous verses and using them to establish our beliefs.

Based on this verse, some object that if Shias and Sunnis disagree over the meaning of a verse, then it cannot possibly be clear and unambiguous. Accordingly, if Shias and Sunnis disagree over the meaning of 4:59, then 4:59 cannot be a clear and unambiguous verse on which Shias can base their aqeeda.

However, this objection misunderstands the meaning of clear and unambiguous. The meaning of clear and unambiguous is that the statement cannot be taken any other way. So even if extensive argument and defense is required for a specific meaning, it would be clear and unambiguous as long as that meaning is the only way that the verse can be taken based on logical arguments, and the rules of grammar and eloquence.

Verse 4:59 is About Khilafa

As mentioned above, Shias and Sunnis both agree that 4:59 establishes Imamah. And for Shias, Imamah and Khilafa are synonymous. As proof that 4:59 is about Imamah/Khilafa, here is a small survey of Sunni *tafasir* on verse 4:59 showing that the verse is discussing the subject of Khilafa.

Commenting on this verse, Ibn al Jawzi (d. 597AH) says: “Regarding Ulil Amr, there are four sayings (opinions): (1) **They are the Amirs**, and this opinion was transmitted by Abu Hurairah and Ibn Abbas in a hadith, Zayd b Aslam, Suddi, and Maqatil; (2) **They are the scholars**; (3) **They are the Sahaba**; or (4) **They are Abu Bakr and Umar**, and this was the opinion of Ikrimah.” (تفسير زاد المسير في علم التفسير / ابن الجوزي)

² I edited the translation according to the reading of Ahlul Bayt. Imam Sadiq (A) said: “نَحْنُ الرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ وَنَحْنُ نَعْلَمُ” (We are those firmly grounded in knowledge and we know the true interpretation (of the Quran)) (Al Kafi)

Something important to mention is that we are not bound by the opinions of the Sahaba on the meaning of these verses. The only *hujjah* (authority) upon us are the words of the Prophet and the words of the Quran. So when Ibn Al Jawzi mentioned four opinions as to who Ulil Amr is, we should not think that there is a legitimate disagreement over the identity of Ulil Amr. Rather, we should only make reference to the Quran and Sunnah. As such, we should only be paying attention to the first view which is substantiated by a hadith. The hadith of Abu Hurairah supporting the view that Ulil Amr are the Amirs³ is quoted by Sunni scholars, Muhammad bin Jarir al Tabari (d. 310 AH) and Ibn Kathir in their tafsirs of 4:59:

Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "Whoever obeys me, obeys Allah, and whoever disobeys me, disobeys Allah, and whoever obeys my Amir, obeys me, and whoever disobeys him, disobeys me." ([تفسير جامع البيان في تفسير القرآن](#)) (Bukhari) (Tafsir Ibn Kathir)

Al-Qurtubi (d. 1273), in his tafsir says that the **majority opinion** among the *salaf* is that 4:59 is regarding the Amirs: *"In this verse, Allah first commanded obedience to himself, and this is compliance with Allah's commands and avoiding His prohibitions, then second, Allah commanded obedience to the Prophet in what he has commanded and prohibited, and then third, Allah commanded obedience to the Amirs, and this is per the opinion of the Jumhur (majority) — Abu Hurairah, Ibn Abbas, and others."* ([تفسير الجامع لاحكام القرآن / القرطبي](#))

Fakhr ad Din al Razi (d. 606 AH), says regarding 4:58-9: *"Know that when the Almighty commanded the governors to be just to their subjects, He (also) commanded the subjects to obey the rulers, and He said: {O you who believe! Obey Allah...}* ([تفسير مفاتيح الغيب ، التفسير الكبير / الرازي](#))

And this is exactly in agreement with what is quoted from Imam Baqir (A) in an authentic hadith: *"Ali bin Ahmad narrated from Obaydillah bin Musa from Ali bin Ibraheem bin Hashim from his father from Hammad bin Eessa from Hurayz from Zurara that he had asked Imam Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Ali al-Baqir (as) about the saying of Allah, "Surely Allah commands you to make over trusts to their owners and that when you judge between people you judge with justice; surely Allah admonishes you with what is excellent," (4:58) and Abu Ja'far al-Baqir said: "The order of Allah in this verse concerns the imamate. Each imam of us has to deliver the imamate to the next imam coming after him. He does not have to hide it from him. Do you not hear Allah saying: (and that when you judge between people you judge with justice; surely Allah admonishes you with what is excellent)? It is the rulers. Do you not see that Allah has addressed the rulers with this verse?"* ([Kitab al Ghayba al Nu'mani](#))

As such, there should be no doubt that verse 4:59 is addressing the subject of Khilafa/Imamah. The only point of discussion left is what the characteristics of the Khalif are. There are a few main questions to answer:

1. What is the scope of obedience to the Ulil Amr that is commanded in this verse?
2. Who are the Ulil Amr?

Scope of Obedience to Ulil Amr

Again, verse 4:59 is plain and unambiguous in that it commands obedience to Ulil Amr. However, is this obedience conditional or unconditional? This obedience is unconditional per the plain meaning of the verse. 4:59 can be broken down into three commands addressed to the believers. The believers should (1) Obey Allah; (2) Obey the Messenger

³ A common (but weak) objection is that the Amir is different from the Khalifa, and hence, citing the opinions of Ibn Abbas or the hadith of obedience to the Amir is no proof at all that this verse relates to Khilafa. However, this objection often comes from an unfamiliarity with the usage of these terms in early Islamic history. If one studies the usage of the words used to describe Khilafa, then it becomes clear that all of these terms were synonymous. Instead of wasting space here to explain, we will instead explain it in the endnotes below.

and Ulil Amr among you; and (3) If the believers disagree over anything, then they should refer those matters to Allah and His Messenger.

There are a few reasons why the second command, to obey the Messenger and Ulil Amr, is **unconditional and absolute**. At bottom, Ulil Amr is conjoined to the Messenger with the conjunction **و** and this is known as **واو عطف**.

This rule (**واو عطف**) can be explained as follows:

وقولنا (العطف يقتضي التشريك في الحكم) معناه أن حكم المعطوف هو نفسه حكم المعطوف عليه، كما لو قلت: (أعط زيدا وعمرا) فهذا تشريك بين زيد وعمرو في الإعطاء

We say "the conjunction requires the sharing of the hukm." The meaning of this is that the conjoined hukm is the same as the one conjoined to it. Such as if I said "Give Zayd and Amr" then this shares between Zayd and Amr in the giving. ([أرشيف ملتقى أهل الحديث](#))

This means the command to obey the Prophet is presumed the same as the command to obey Ulil Amr until proven otherwise, so their obedience is the same. On its face and on the most plain reading of the verse and the surrounding verses, the command to obey Ulil Amr is general, and is mentioned without any conditions in the verse or any of the surrounding verses. Thus, the command remains unconditional without any evidence otherwise.

However, in addition to this plain reading presumption, there are a few powerful clues which can prove that this command is unconditional:

First, the Quran does not neglect to mention conditions on obedience in many of the commands mentioned in it. So how could it be conceivable that Allah made this command conditional, but neglected to mention conditions for it?

- In **fasting**, Allah says "*O believers! Fasting is prescribed for you... **whoever of you is ill or on a journey, then let them fast an equal number of days after Ramaḍān***." (2:183-184).
- In **prayer**, Allah says: "*When you travel through the land, **it is permissible for you to shorten the prayer if you fear an attack by the disbelievers. Indeed, the disbelievers are your sworn enemies***" (4:101).
- For **wudhu** Allah says: "*O believers! When you rise up for prayer, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows, wipe your heads, and wash your feet to the ankles. And if you are in a state of 'full' impurity, I then take a full bath. **But if you are ill, on a journey, or have relieved yourselves, or have been intimate with your wives and cannot find water, then purify yourselves with clean earth by wiping your faces and hands. It is not Allah's Will to burden you, but to purify you and complete His favour upon you, so perhaps you will be grateful.***" (5:6)
- For **Hajj**, Allah says: "***Those who have the means and ability have a duty to God to visit the House and perform the hajj (pilgrimage) rituals***" (3:97), and also says: "*And complete the ḥajj and 'umrah for Allāh. **But if you are prevented, then [offer] what can be obtained with ease of sacrificial animals. And do not shave your heads until the sacrificial animal has reached its place of slaughter. And whoever among you is ill or has an ailment of the head [making shaving necessary must offer] a ransom of fasting [three days] or charity or sacrifice. And when you are secure, then whoever performs 'umrah [during the ḥajj months]4 followed by ḥajj [offers] what can be obtained with ease of sacrificial animals. And whoever cannot find [or afford such an animal] - then a fast of three days during ḥajj and of seven when you have returned [home]. Those are ten complete [days]. This is for those whose family is not in the area of al-Masjid al-Ḥarām. And fear Allāh and know that Allāh is severe in penalty.***" (2:196)
- Regarding obedience to parents Allah says: "*We have commanded people to honour their parents. **But if they urge you to associate with Me what you have no knowledge of, then do not obey them.***" (29:8).

- For food, Allah mentions: *“Prohibited for you are: the carrion, the blood, the flesh of swine, and what has been invoked upon with (a name) other than that of Allah, and the animals dead by strangulation, dead by blow, dead by a fall, dead by goring, and that which a beast has eaten unless you have properly slaughtered it; and that which has been slaughtered before the idols and that you determine shares through the arrows. This is sin. Today those who disbelieve have lost hopes of (damaging) your faith. So, do not fear them, and fear Me.... But whoever is compelled by severe hunger with no way out, having no inclination, then Allah is Most-Forgiving, Very-Merciful.”* (5:3)

However, 4:59 is addressing **something of greater importance**—the Khilafa and the wellbeing of the Muslims (this point will be elaborated later). If Allah would choose to mention conditions on obedience to parents and all other commands of Islam, then Allah would have surely mentioned conditions on a matter of greater importance.

Second, it would not make sense that Allah would obligate obedience to Ulil Amr, and then proceed to allow people to then disagree with and disobey Ulil Amr. An authentic hadith from Imam Sadiq (A) mentions this point. Imam Sadiq said: *“How can He (Allah) Command for their (Ulil Amr’s) obedience and then allow them (the people) to dispute with them (Ulil Amr)? But rather, He (Allah) has addressed that [command] to the commanded ones (the believers) when He (Allah) Said to them (the people): ‘Obey Allah and obey the Messenger’*” ([Al Kafi](#))

Despite this, Sunnis believe that the command to obey Ulil Amr is **conditional**. Their reasons and arguments are outlined below along with the response to each:

Objection 1: The verse says: “Should you disagree on anything...” (فَإِنْ تَنَازَعْتُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ) and so this means that people can disagree with Ulil Amr. **Response:** There is no reason why we should assume this to mean that we can disagree with Ulil Amr, because “Should you disagree on anything” is not addressed to Ulil Amr, and there is no proof that it is. The ف at the beginning of that clause indicates a separate command addressed to those called at the beginning of the verse (i.e. the Believers)

Objection 2: Allah addressing the believers in the beginning of the verse means that Ulil Amr are included amongst the believers addressed by the command “Should you disagree on anything...” because Ulil Amr are also believers, and so it is permitted to disagree with Ulil Amr. **Response:** By the logic of this objection, the Prophet should also be included amongst the believers addressed by the command “Should you disagree on anything...” because obviously the Prophet is also a believer. This would mean that the believers can dispute with the Prophet. Obviously, this is an incorrect result.

Objection 3: If obedience to Ulil Amr were unconditional, then why is it that the end of the verse says to refer back to Allah and His Messenger only, and why does it not include Ulil Amr as a source to refer to as well? **Response:** All this demonstrates is that Ulil Amr, per this verse, does not have the power of legislation like Allah and the Prophet do. Moreover, this command *is* the command to refer to Ulil Amr—at least within Shia beliefs—since the Prophet has already told us to refer to Ahlul Bayt after him in Hadith Thaqaalayn: *“O mankind! I have left behind over you that which if you hold fast to it you will never go astray the Book of Allah and my offspring, my Ahl al-Bayt.”* ([Tirmidhi](#)) Finally, it’s unclear how there is any logical link between this objection and the question of whether obedience to Ulil Amr is conditional or not.

Objection 4: Some Sunni hadiths indicate that obedience to the Caliph is conditional. For example: *“There is no obedience to anyone if it is disobedience to Allah. Verily, obedience is only in good conduct.”* ([Muslim](#)). Could it not be the case that the verse simply lays down a general principle and that these hadith elaborate this obedience and define its scope? **Response:** **First**, based on the arguments above, such ahadith cannot apply to the caliphate, as this would contradict the plain reading of the Quran which supports

unconditional obedience. **Second**, the hadith quoted does not mention Khilafa and there is no proof it is regarding Khilafa. Rather, as far as we know, obedience to the Caliph is equated with obedience to the Prophet: *Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, "Whoever obeys me, obeys Allah, and whoever disobeys me, disobeys Allah, and whoever obeys my Amir, obeys me, and whoever disobeys him, disobeys me."* ([تفسير جامع البيان في تفسير القرآن](#) (Bukhari) (Tafsir Ibn Kathir). **Third**, were the command conditional, then obedience to the Prophet would be conditional as well since they are conjoined by *واو عطف*, and obviously that is an incorrect result. Because of this, any hadiths that say that obedience to Ulil Amr is conditional should be rejected on the plain meaning of 4:59.

With all objections answered, and the verse being clear, we have no other choice but to accept that obedience to Ulil Amr is absolute and unconditional. This has an important implication. Allah says in 7:28 "...Allah does not command immorality..." (إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَأْمُرُ بِالْفَحْشَاءِ), meaning that Allah will not command anything sinful or wrong. If Allah will not command sin or wrongdoing, and if Allah commands unconditional and absolute obedience to Ulil Amr, then that means that Ulil Amr cannot command sin or wrongdoing. This is because if Ulil Amr could command sin or wrongdoing, then because their obedience is absolute and unconditional, they would have to be obeyed in sin, and if they are obeyed in sin, it means Allah would have commanded sin. This means that Ulil Amr cannot command sin or wrongdoing, and **therefore they must also be infallible**. (See especially, [Tafsir al Mizan](#) on 4:59 and 4:83 for more details, as many of the points here are summarized from there.)

In turn, Fakhr ad Din al Razi writes: "*Know that: '{And those in authority among you}' indicates to us that the consensus (ijmaa) of the Ummah is considered as evidence. The proof for this is that Allah Almighty commanded obedience to those in authority in an unconditional way in this verse. When Allah commands obedience to His authority in an unconditional and absolute way, he must be infallible from sin. If he were not infallible from sin, because of allowing him to commit sin, it would mean that Allah commanded His followers to follow that sin, making it an order to commit a sin. Since sins are forbidden, this leads to the convergence of command and prohibition in a single action and consideration. This is impossible. Therefore, it is established that Allah Almighty commanded obedience to those in authority without conditions. And it is established that anyone whom Allah commanded to be obeyed in a definitive manner must be infallible from sin. Thus, it is definitively established that those in authority mentioned in this verse must be infallible.*" ([تفسير مفاتيح الغيب، التفسير الكبير / الرازي](#))

Obviously, we reject Al Razi's belief that obedience to Ulil Amr means the *ijmaa* of the Ummah, but what he makes clear in this passage is that whoever this Ulil Amr are, their obedience is unconditional and they must be infallible based on the above considerations.

Details About Khilafa

If the verse of 4:59 is about Khilafa, then we must discuss the pertinent details of Khilafa. We already discussed one crucial detail above from the Quran itself, that the Ulil Amr must be infallible, but we also must discuss the details of Khilafa as explained by the Prophet himself. It is perfectly acceptable for the Quran to lay out general principles and beliefs, and for the Prophet to explain them in further detail.

Ibn Uthaymeen, prominent contemporary Sunni Mufti, says:

O brothers, there are some people who interpret the statement of Allah (swt): "And in no way is there a beast (moving) in the earth nor a bird flying with its two wings except that they are nations like you. In no way have We neglected anything whatever in the Book; thereafter to their Lord they will be mustered"; interpret His statement: "In no way have We neglected anything whatever in the Book" that the Book here is the Holy Qur'aan.

The correct is that book is the Preserved Tablet (Al-Lawh Al-Mahfoodh), and as for the Holy Qur'aan, then Allah (swt) had described the Holy Qur'aan in a more eloquent style than the negation one, wherein His statement about it is: "And We have been sending down on you the Book as an evident (exposition) of everything," which is more eloquent and voluble than His statement: "In no way have We neglected anything whatever in the Book."

*Perhaps someone says: **Where could we find the number of the five prayers in the Holy Qur'aan? And the number of each prayer in the Holy Qur'aan? And how could that we do not find the number of each prayer mentioned in the Holy Qur'aan while Allah (swt) says: "And We have been sending down on you the Book as an evident (exposition) of everything?!"***

The answer of which is that Allah (swt) has clarified for us in His book that it is obligatory upon us to take what the Prophet (saw) had uttered and what he pointed to. "Whoever obeys the Messenger (saw), then he has already obeyed Allah (swt)," "And whatever the Messenger (saw) brings you, then take it; and whatever he forbids you, then give over."

Therefore, anything that is explained by the Sunnah was pointed out by the Holy Qur'aan itself, since the Sunnah is one of the two revelation forms which was revealed and taught to the Prophet (saw) by Allah (swt), as Allah Almighty says: "And Allah has sent down on you the Book and (the) Wisdom." And thus, anything which is mentioned in the Sunnah was actually mentioned in book of Allah Almighty.

And similarly, an authentic hadith of Imam Sadiq says:

... "People say, "Why did He not specify Ali and his family by their names in the book of Allah, the Most Holy, the Most High?" The Imam (a.s) said, "Say to them, 'The command for prayer came to the Messenger of Allah but He has not specified (the number of the Rak'ats) for them three nor four. It, in fact, was the Messenger of Allah who explained to them this matter. The command for Zakat (a form of income tax) came to the Messenger of Allah and there was no specific taxable number such as one Dirham on every forty Dirham. It was the Messenger of Allah who explained it for them. The command for Hajj came to the Messenger of Allah. It did not say walk seven times around the Ka'ba It was the Messenger of Allah who explained it for them. The verse about obedience came "Believers, obey God, His Messenger, and your leaders (who possess Divine authority). . ." (4:59) It came to declare that Ali, al-Hassan and al-Husayn (a.s) were the leaders who possessed Divine authority. The Messenger of Allah then said about Ali (a.s), "man kuntu mawla fa'Aliun mawla."..." ([Al Kafi](#))

Necessity of Imamah/Khilafa

Imamah is a necessity, and knowing one's Imam is required. Sunnis and Shias agree on a few major hadiths in this regard.

First: "The earth is not devoid of a **hujjah**" ("تَخْلُو مِنْ حُجَّةٍ وَأَنَا وَاللَّهُ ذَلِكَ الْحُجَّةُ") (Sunnī sources and explanations can be found in [RevisitingTheSalaf, Imam Mahdi Part II](#) — **It is highly recommended to read and internalize the meaning of this article**)

In Shia books: "Al-Hassan ibn Muhammad has narrated from Muhammad ibn Mu'alla ibn Muhammad from some of our people from abu Ali ibn Rashid from abu al-Hassan (a.s) who has said the following. " The earth is never

without a person with divine authority and I swear to Allah that I am the person with Divine authority.” (إِنَّ الْأَرْضَ لَا تَبْرُكُ إِلَّا بِرَسُولٍ يُخْلِقُ مِنْ حُجَّةٍ وَأَنَا وَاللَّهُ ذَلِكَ الْحُجَّةُ) (Al Kafi)⁴

This hadith establishes that the earth is never completely devoid of Allah’s infallible guidance at any point. Of course, this is already established by the Quran when the Quran says: “...and for every people is a guide.” (13:7)—(“وَلِكُلِّ قَوْمٍ هَادٍ”). If this is the case, then divine guidance has not ended with the death of the Prophet, which means that there must be an infallible authority on this earth at this very moment. Now we will address some objections:

Objection 1: Sunnis believe that the *hujjah* after the Prophet had died are the scholars of the Ummah, and Shia claim that the *hujjah* after the Prophet is the A’imma of Ahlul Bayt. However, currently, the 12th Imam is in Ghayba, so how can we say that Allah’s infallible guidance is with us on earth?

Response: Sheikh Mufid answers as follows:

Occultation does not contradict the need of having someone who is the guardian of the Sharī’ah and the creed. Can you not see that the Shī’ah themselves have taken up the responsibility for dissemination of religious teachings, such that he himself does not need to do so? The same applies to administering corporal punishments and application of religious edicts; sometimes, the representatives of the Imāms are given the discretion to implement them. This same logic applies to the issue of jihād; in fact, this applied even in the times of the Prophets, who had appointed deputies to command their battalions.

Therefore, whenever there is someone who stands up to represent the creed on the Imām’s behalf, the immediate responsibility is alleviated from the Imām (as) and he may remain covert. In contrast, when all individuals refuse to do so and become perverse in their religious duties, he must re-appear to assume the responsibility for himself.

It is precisely because of this reason that his existence becomes rationally necessary; his non-existence or demise would preclude him from protecting the religion and therefore it is reprehensible. (Al-Fusūl al-‘Asharah fī al-Ghaybah)

In other words, the presence of the Imam as a *hujjah* is still necessary even if the scholars have taken up the reigns because if the Imam were not present, then the religion could be permanently corrupted. The absence of Imam Mahdi does not mean that infallible guidance has left us completely—rather infallible guidance is still there, and it has not become necessary for it to be made apparent again. Of course, one can also refer to the many examples Sheikh Saduq mentions in his *Kamalludin Wal Tamaman al Ni’ma* of times where other prophets went into “ghayba” as well. And Mufid’s explanation is confirmed by authentic Shia hadiths as well:

Ali ibn Ibrahim has narrated from his father from Muhammad ibn abu ‘Umayr from Mansur ibn Yunus and Su’dan ibn Muslim from Ishaq ibn ‘Ammara from abu ‘Abdallah (a.s.) who has said the

⁴ Note: This particular rendition of the hadith is weak, however, an authentic version uses the word *Imam* instead of *Hujjah* (“Ali ibn Ibrahim has narrated from his father from Muhammad ibn abu ‘Umayr from Mansur ibn Yunus and Su’dan ibn Muslim from Ishaq ibn ‘Ammara from abu ‘Abdallah (a.s.) who has said the following. “I heard the Imam (a.s.) saying, ‘The earth is never left without an Imam so that if the believers would add any thing it would be brought back and if they would reduce anything it would be completed.’”) (Al Kafi) This is not a problem since for Shia, the concepts of *Imam*, *muhaddith*, *hujjah*, etc. are all synonymous references to the same position of divinely appointed authority over the people. Moreover, multiple other chains in Shia books corroborate the wording that uses *hujjah* anyway.

following. "I heard the Imam (a.s.) saying, 'The earth is never left without an Imam so that if the believers would add any thing it would be brought back and if they would reduce anything it would be completed.'" ([Al Kafi](#))

Objection 2: The Quran is the infallible *hujjah* among us that guarantees that we would not be misguided, since the Quran says (among many other verses): "...the Quran was revealed as a guide for humanity with clear proofs of guidance and the standard 'to distinguish between right and wrong...' " (2:185) Response: There are three responses. (1) The Quran makes it clear that the Prophet is also a source of our guidance and that we must seek out the Sunnah as well "But no, by your Lord, they will not [truly] believe until they make you, [O Muhammad], judge concerning that over which they dispute among themselves and then find within themselves no discomfort from what you have judged and submit in [full, willing] submission." (4:65), so it is not true that the Quran alone is sufficient; (2) The Prophet himself already mentioned in *Hadith al Thaqalayn*: "O mankind! I have left behind over you that which if you hold fast to it you will never go astray the Book of Allah and my offspring, my Ahl al-Bayt." ([Tirmidhi](#)) and this means that Ahlul Bayt, alongside the Quran are the infallible guidances among us; (3) An authentic hadith from Imam Sadiq explains the problem with saying that the Quran alone is sufficient as a guide:

Muhammad ibn Isma'il has narrated from al-Fadl ibn Shadhan from Safwan ibn Yahya from Mansur ibn Hazim who has said the following. "I said to Imam abu 'Abdallah (a.s), 'Allah by far above Majestic and Gracious to be known through His creatures. In fact, the creatures are known through Allah.'" The Imam (a.s) said, "You have spoken the truth." I said, "One who knows that he has a Lord, he must also learn that his Lord agrees with certain things and disagrees with certain other things. The only way he would know what his like and dislikes is revelation or a messenger. One does not receive revelation he must find the messengers and when finds the messengers he will know that they the Divine authority and that obedience to them is necessary. I say to people, "Do you know that the messenger of Allah was the Divine authority over His creatures?" They say, "Yes, he was the Divine authority." I then ask, "After the messenger of Allah who was the Divine authority over His creatures?" They said, "After the messenger of Allah the Divine authority is the Holy Quran." I considered the Holy Quran and found out that various kinds of people consider this Holy Book as support for their beliefs. For example the Murji'a (people who say Allah has postponed punishment), the pre-determinists and the atheist who even do not believe in it but take it as the basis for their arguments against the others. I then learned that the Holy Quran can not serve as Divine authority without a guardian whose words from the Holy Quran would be the truth. I then ask the people, "Who is the guardian of the Holy Quran?" They say, "Ibn Mas'ud knew the Holy Quran, Umar knew it and Hudhayfa knew the Holy Quran." I ask them, "Did they know all of the Holy Quran?" The people say, "No, they did not know all of it." I have not found anyone who would know all of the Holy Quran except Ali ibn abu Talib (a.s). It is a fact that if any issue would emerge that needed a Quranic solution, except for Imam Ali (a.s) every one of the others would, in many cases, say, "I do not know." Only Imam Ali (a.s) would say, "I know." I then acknowledge that Imam Ali (a.s) is the guardian of the Holy Quran and obedience to him is obligatory and he is the Divine authority over the people after the Holy Prophet (s.a.). Whatever Imam Ali (a.s) has said from the Holy Quran is the truth." The Imam (a.s) said, "May Allah grant you blessing." ([Al Kafi](#))

And Imam Ali did indeed say that he knew when others did not. Consider the following quotation from Sunni sources which is authentic on Sunni standards:

Narrated Abu Tufayl (رضي الله عنهم): 'I witnessed Ali (عليه السلام) giving a sermon and saying, "Ask me for I swear by Allah (سبحانه وتعالى) there is not a single thing that you can ask me about until

the day of Judgement except that I can tell you about it and ask me about the Book of Allah (سبحانه وتعالى), for I swear by Allah (سبحانه وتعالى) there is not a verse in it except that I know whether it was revealed during the night or the day, whether it was revealed in a plain or on a mountain.” (Jami' Bayan Al Ilm Wa Fadhleh) (Tafsir Ibn Kathir)

Objection 3: If Imamah is so important for our guidance, why isn't it somewhere clearly and repeatedly emphasized in the Quran? Response: It is mentioned clearly in the Quran in 4:59. The fact that it is only mentioned once does not prove that it is unimportant. Fasting is only mentioned once in the passages of 2:183-2:184, yet no one would say that fasting is unimportant in Islam. Rather, it is among the pillars of Islam!

Second: “Whoever dies without an oath of allegiance, dies a death of Jahiliyya” (وَمَنْ مَاتَ وَلَيْسَ فِي عُنُقِهِ بَيْعَةُ مَاتَ مِيتَةً جَاهِلِيَّةً) (Muslim)

And likewise, in Shia books: Ahmad ibn Idris has narrated from Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Jabbar from Safwan from al-Fudayl from al-Harith ibn al-Mughira who has said the following. “I said to abu ‘Abdallah (a.s) , ‘the Messenger of Allah has said, “Whoever would die without knowing who his Imam is he would die as if has died in ignorance (of religion).” The Imam (a.s) said, “That is true.” I then said, “Is it the ignorance of uneducated people or ignorance of ones not knowing his Imam?” The Imam (a.s) said, “It means the ignorance that is disbelief, hypocrisy and error?” (مَنْ مَاتَ لَا يَعْرِفُ إِمَامَهُ مَاتَ مِيتَةً جَاهِلِيَّةً) (Al Kafi)

Such hadiths are confirmed by the Quran when the Quran says “(Remember) the day when We will call every people with their Imam” (17:71)—(“يَوْمَ نَدْعُوا كُلَّ أُنَاسٍ بِإِمَامِهِمْ”) and “We appointed them as leaders (Imams) to guide the people through Our command . . .” (21:73) (“وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أُمَمًا يَهْتَدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا”) and “We made them the kinds of leaders (Imams) who would invite people to the fire . . .” (28:41) (“وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أُمَمًا يَدْعُونَ إِلَى النَّارِ”). So the Quran is clearly saying that there are two kinds of Imams: those who call to guidance through the command of Allah and those who call to the fire, and then the Quran says that it will raise all people behind their Imam on the Day of Resurrection. This necessitates that one must know their Imam, and more importantly that this Imam is an Imam of guidance. And it is not optional for one to disregard knowing their Imam because we will be called to account behind our Imam on the Day of Judgement. This argument, of course, is confirmed by authentic Shia hadiths:

Muhammad ibn Yahya has narrated from Ahmad ibn Muhammad and Muhammad ibn al-Husayn from Muhammad ibn Yahya from Talha ibn Zayd from abu ‘Abdallah (a.s) who has said the following. “The Imams mentioned in the book of Allah, the Most Holy, the Most High, are of two kinds. Allah, the Most Holy, the Most High has said, ‘We appointed them as leaders (Imams) to guide the people through Our command . . .’ (21:73) They do so but not because of the commands of the people. They allow our command to come first and before their own orders, and our laws before their own laws and judgment. “We made them the kinds of leaders (Imams) who would invite people to the fire . . .” (28:41) ‘They let their own commands to come before the commands of Allah and their laws before the laws of Allah. They follow their desires against what the book of Allah, the Most Holy, the Most High requires.’” (Al Kafi)

Muhammad ibn Yahya has narrated from Ahmad ibn Muhammad from al-Hassan ibn Mahbub from ‘Abdallah ibn Ghalib from Jabir from abu Ja’far (a.s) who has said the following. “When the following verse of the Holy Quran was revealed, “On the day when We call every nation with their leaders, (Imams) . . .” (17:71), people asked the Holy Prophet (s.a.), ‘Are you not the Imam of all the people altogether?’ The Holy Prophet (s.a.) said, “I am the Messenger of Allah to all the people but after me there will the Imams for the people from my family. They will rise among the people but they will be rejected. The leaders of the unbelievers and misguidance and their followers will do injustice to them. Those who support, love, follow and acknowledge their authority they are from me, with me and will meet me. Let it be known that those

who would do injustice to the Imams (a.s) and reject them they are not from me and with me. I denounce them and all associations with them.” (Al Kafi)

How Are the Caliphs Chosen?

The Caliphs are chosen by divine appointment. There are two proofs for this: (1) It has always been the continued practice of Allah that leadership is established through divine appointment, and the Quran makes it clear that the continued practice of Allah does not change. Therefore, this practice of divine appointment would not have changed after the Prophet. (2) The Prophet himself was concerned with the appointment of authority in various different places in his lifetime. If the Prophet was concerned with appointing leaders for small expeditions and short absences, then it is inconceivable that he would not have appointed someone after his death.

What is *not* acceptable is to suggest that the Prophet left no way at all for the Ummah to determine who the next Caliph should be. It is necessary for the Prophet to have informed us how to appoint or designate a Caliph because the Sharia is all-encompassing and includes every situation and every facet of life.

The Prophet clearly spent a great deal of effort and time explaining the Khilafa, that they are to be obeyed, their numbers, and so on, so how could it be conceivable that the Prophet would leave something as important as the method by which we are supposed to designate a Caliph untouched? This necessitates that the Prophet must have explained how to designate a Caliph *somehow*—either he explained a procedure somewhere or, as we Shia say, he himself designated his successor.

As for the proofs that the Sharia is all-encompassing (and this concept is known as *shumul al shari'a*), there are not many within Sunni hadiths. The only reference I could find is as follows:

Salman reported that it was said to him: Your Apostle (ﷺ) teaches you about everything, even about excrement. He replied: Yes, he has forbidden us to face the Qibla at the time of excretion or urination, or cleansing with right hand or with less than three pebbles, or with dung or bone. (Muslim)

This is not a narration of the Prophet. Rather, it is a saying of a Sahabi. Nevertheless, the reasoning provided is valid as this is a form of reasoning known as *qiyas awlawiyya*. Basically, this means that when there is a command to do something or refrain from something lesser, it necessarily includes a command to do or refrain from the greater. For example, the Quran says “... say not to them [so much as], "uff," and do not repel them but speak to them a noble word.” (17:23). This means the Quran, by prohibiting even the term “uff” has prohibited all other greater disobedience and insolence to one’s parents. Likewise, the Prophet had spent time explaining even the most mundane elements of daily life, and therefore, he must have also explained greater and more important matters like governance and leadership.

However, Shia narrations on *shumul al shari'a* are quite clear—every situation is covered by the Quran and Sunnah:

Ali has narrated from Muhammad from Yunus from aban from Sulayman ibn Harun who has said the following. “Abu ‘Abdallah (a.s) has said, ‘All that Allah has created has a limit like the limits of a house, in which case what is of house is of the house and what is of the road and the walkway is of the walkway. Even the law for the compensation for a scratch, and a penalty in form of a lash or half a lashing.’” (Al Kafi)

Additionally, *shumul al shari'a* can be derived from the following verses:

Say, 'O Prophet, ' "O Allah—Originator of the heavens and the earth, Knower of the seen and unseen! You will judge between Your servants regarding their differences. " (39:46)

..."But Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that over which they used to differ" (2:113)

"And if there is a party of you who believe in that with which am sent, and another party who do not believe, then wait patiently until Allah judges between us; and He is the best of the Judges". (7:87)

..."The judgment is only Allah's; He relates the truth and He is the best of deciders" (6:57)

Have you 'O Prophet` not seen those who claim they believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you? They seek the judgment of false judges, which they were commanded to reject. And Satan 'only` desires to lead them farther away. (4:60)... By your Lord, they will not be true believers until they let you decide between them in all matters of dispute, and find no resistance in their souls to your decisions, accepting them totally- (4:65)

...God will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning their differences. (45:17)

"Shall I seek for judge other than Allah? - when He is the One Who has sent unto you the Book, explained in detail." (6:114)

"And in whatever thing you disagree, the judgment thereof is (in) Allah's (hand); that is Allah, my Lord, on Him do I rely and to Him do I turn time after time." (42:10)

[\(Divine Judgement Verses Human Judgement](#) - Hatem Abu Shahba). As such, there should be little doubt in our minds that Allah must have created a process by which a Caliph is chosen, especially when this was a matter that created so much division and disunity among the Ummah. Indeed, if Allah had not either created a way to know a successor or specifically designated a successor and left people to dispute and disagree, then this would violate the Quran's own command: *"Hold fast to the rope of Allah, and do not become divided..." (3:103).*

The Continuous Practice of the Qur'an

Every time leadership is discussed in the Quran, it is always in the context of divine appointment. Allah in the Quran establishes that His continued and repeated practice is something which does not change. This means that since leadership has always been related to divine appointment, then it will always continue to be related to divine appointment. Allah says:

But you will never find in the way of Allah any change, and you will never find in the way of Allah any alteration. (35:43)

[That is Our] established way for those We had sent before you of Our messengers; and you will not find in Our way any alteration. (17:77)

[This is] the established way of Allah with those who passed on before; and you will not find in the way of Allah any change. (33:62)

[This is] the established way of Allah which has occurred before. And never will you find in the way of Allah any change. (48:23)

Starting from Prophet Adam, Allah has always appointed leaders: *Remember when your Lord said to the angels, "I am going to place a successive authority (khalifa) on earth."* (2:30). And this authority continued to be passed on through divine appointment as can be seen in other verses:

(We said to him): "O David, We have appointed you vicegerent (khalifa) on earth. Therefore, rule among people with justice and do not follow (your) desire lest it should lead you astray from Allah's Path. (38:26)

Their prophet said to them: "Allah has appointed Tālūt as a king for you." (2:247)

So, if it is the continued practice of Allah to appoint leaders, and if there is no change in the continued practice of Allah, then there is no change in how leadership and authority is chosen after the Prophet as well, and therefore it is necessary for there to have been a divine appointment.

Sunnah of the Prophet to Appoint Leaders in His Absence

Earlier we used *qiyas awlawiyya* to show that the Prophet must have included instructions on how to appoint a caliph in the Sharia since it would be inconceivable that he had explained mundane and unimportant matters in great detail yet chose to stay silent on such important and foundational matters. Similarly, we find that the Prophet had a practice of appointing leaders of expeditions, or caretakers while he was absent. If the Prophet appointed leaders for short absences and small expeditions, how could it be conceivable that the Prophet would not appoint a leader to take charge after his death when the management of the Ummah after the Prophet's death is far more sensitive than the management of the Ummah for a short absence?

Here are three short examples from the life of the Prophet demonstrating that the Prophet had a consistent practice of appointing leaders to take charge on matters.

1. During the Prophet's expedition to Tabuk, he appointed Imam Ali (a) to be his deputy in Medina and he said: *"Narrated Sa'd: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) set out for Tabuk. appointing 'Ali as his deputy (in Medina). 'Ali said, "Do you want to leave me with the children and women?" The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Will you not be pleased that you will be to me like Aaron to Moses? But there will be no prophet after me." (Bukhari)* (And the version in [Sunan al Kubra](#) includes extra words at the end: ***"And you will be the Caliph over every believer after me."*** This additional wording is authentic according to multiple Sunni scholars: Ahmad Shakir, Albani, Ibn Abd al Barr, Al Hakim al Nayshaburi, and Dhahabi)
2. During the Prophet's final moments, he appointed Usama bin Zayd as the leader of the military expedition: *"Narrated 'Abdullah bin 'Umar: Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) sent troops appointed Usama bin Zaid as their commander. The people criticized his leadership. Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) got up and said, "If you (people) are criticizing his (i.e. Usama's) leadership you used to criticize the leadership of his father before. By Allah, he (i.e. Zaid) deserved the leadership indeed, and he used to be one of the most beloved persons to me, and now this (i.e. his son, Usama) is one of the most beloved persons to me after him." (Bukhari)*
3. In another hadith, the Prophet said: *Narrated Abu Sa'id al-Khudri: The Prophet (ﷺ) said: When three are on a journey, they should appoint one of them as their commander. (Abu Dawud)*. Indeed, if the Prophet was concerned about the leadership of a group of three, how could it be conceivable that he would be unconcerned with the leadership of the entire Muslim Ummah after the death of the Prophet?