

THE ISSUE OF FAITH IN THE WORKS OF FALSE SALAFIS

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Annotation: In this article, the attitude of representatives of the modern movement known as “false Salafis” towards the issue of faith (iman) is analyzed. The scientific differences between the definitions of the concept of iman given by Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama‘a and the salaf as-salihin, and the approaches found in the works of today’s pseudo-Salafis are revealed. The article also presents ideas about the original goals of the early Salafī movement and the distortion of these goals by modern radical groups.

Keywords: iman, Salafism, Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama‘a, aqida, pseudo-Salafis, fiqh, kalam.

In recent centuries, the term “Salafism” has been used in the Islamic world in different meanings. The path of the first salaf as-salihin — the sacred generation consisting of the Companions (sahaba), the Tabi‘in and the Tabi‘ al-Tabi‘in — is considered the main spiritual path of Islam. However, today among groups acting under the name “Salafī,” there are serious doctrinal and methodological differences. Some of these groups interpret the concept of iman in a way completely different from the teachings of Ahl al-Sunna. While claiming to follow the path of the salaf, in fact they distort the true creed of the pious predecessors and introduce teachings inclined toward extremism and takfīr.

The scholars of Ahl al-Sunna, including Imam Abu Hanifa (رحمه الله), Imam Maturidi, and Imam Ash‘ari, defined iman as follows:

الإيمان هو التصديق بالقلب والإقرار باللسان

“Al-īmān huwa at-taṣḍīq bil-qalb wal-iqrār bil-lisān.”

“Faith is affirmation by the heart and declaration by the tongue.”

Imam Abu Hanifa stated in Al-Fiqh al-Akbar:

الإيمان لا يزيد ولا ينقص

“Al-īmān lā yazīdu wa lā yanquṣu.”

“Faith neither increases nor decreases.”

According to this definition, the essence of faith does not change, but its perfection increases through good deeds and decreases through sins. This reflects the balanced, middle path of Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama‘a.

Modern “false Salafī” movements (especially some groups such as takfiris, jihadists, and Wahhabis) define iman as being inseparable from actions. They say:

الإيمان قول باللسان واعتقاد بالقلب وعمل بالجوارح

“Al-īmān qawl bil-lisān wa i‘tiqād bil-qalb wa ‘amal bil-jawāriḥ.”

“Faith is speech by the tongue, belief in the heart, and action by the limbs.”

Based on this definition, they consider action an integral part of faith and go so far as to declare a Muslim who does not act according to their understanding an unbeliever. This formed the theoretical basis of takfir ideology. These pseudo-Salafis selectively use only the literal parts of the works of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim, rejecting their rational and interpretive explanations (ta’wil). As a result, their concept of iman has become a mechanical notion tied only to outward actions.

Maturidi scholars rejected this view, stating that action pertains not to the essence of faith but to its perfection. Imam Nasafi wrote in Aqaid:

الأعمال ليست من حقيقة الإيمان، ولكنها شرط كمال له

“Al-a‘māl laysat min ḥaqīqat al-īmān, walākinahā sharṭ kamāl lahu.”

“Actions are not part of the essence of faith, but they are a condition of its perfection.”

From this it becomes clear that the Ahl al-Sunna doctrine recognizes a person as a Muslim on the basis of verbal declaration and inner conviction alone. Actions strengthen faith but are not the fundamental factor determining its existence. Moreover, the frequently used slogan among pseudo-Salafis — “faith increases and decreases” — is also misunderstood. They take this as an essential increase or decrease, whereas in Ahl al-Sunna this refers to increase and decrease in virtue and perfection, not in the core essence of faith.

Such a distorted approach to the concept of faith in pseudo-Salafi literature has paved the way for radical ideas. By declaring Muslims who do not act or do not share their views as unbelievers, they have caused division, discord, and even bloodshed in society. This is completely contrary to the way of the salaf as-salihin. During the time of the Companions, a person who did not perform actions but affirmed faith in his heart was still called a mu’min (believer), and no one declared him a disbeliever.

The doctrine on faith developed by pseudo-Salafis differs fundamentally from the creed of Ahl al-Sunna wal-Jama’a. In their works, excessive emphasis is placed on actions, while the role of inner conviction and divine mercy is ignored. True Salafi creed, as preserved by the scholars of Ahl al-Sunna, focuses on the heart’s faith, verbal confession, and perfection through good deeds — not on takfir and extremism.

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