10065 - Who are the ones who will be excused for ignorance about ‘aqeedah and matters of fiqh?

the question

Who are the ones who will be excused for ignorance? Will a person be excused for ignorance about matters of fiqh, or about matters of ‘aqeedah and Tawheed? What is the duty of the scholars with regard to this matter?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Claiming that one is ignorant or using this as an excuse is a matter which needs further discussion. Not everyone can be excused for his ignorance. With regard to the things which were brought by Islam, which the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) explained and which were made clear in the Book of Allaah and are widely known among the Muslims, no claim of ignorance will be accepted in these cases, especially in matters with have to do with ‘aqeedah and the basics of religion. Allaah sent His Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) to teach the people their religion and explain it to them, and he conveyed the message clearly and explained to the ummah the truths of their religion. He explained everything and left them with a clear path which is always obvious. In the Book of Allaah there is guidance and light. If some people claim to be ignorant about things which are known to be essential parts of the religion and which are well known among the Muslims, such as claiming to be ignorant about shirk and worshipping anything other than Allaah, or claiming that salaah is not obligatory, or that fasting Ramadaan is not obligatory, or that paying zakaah is not obligatory, or that doing Hajj when one is able to is not obligatory – in these and similar matters, claims of ignorance are unacceptable from those who live among the Muslims, because they are matters which are well known among the Muslims. They are known to be essential parts of the Muslim religion and are widely known among

the Muslims, so the claim of ignorance of these matters is unacceptable. This is the case if a person were to claim that he does not know that what the mushrikeen do at the graves or idols is wrong, when they call upon the dead, seek their help, offer sacrifices to them and make vows to them, or offer sacrifices to the idols, stars, trees or rocks; or seek healing or help against their enemies from the dead or idols or jinn or angels or Prophets… All of these are things which are known essentially in the religion that they are major shirk (al-shirk al-akbar). Allaah explained this clearly in His Book, and His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) explained it clearly. He remained in Makkah for thirteen years warning the people against this shirk, and he preached the same message in Madeenah for ten years, explaining to them that it is obligatory for their worship to be purely and sincerely for Allaah Alone, and reciting to them the Book of Allaah, such as the verses (interpretation of the meaning):

"And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him"

[al-Israa' 17:23]

"You (Alone) we worship, and You (Alone) we ask for help (for each and everything). [al-Faatihah 1:5]

"And they were commanded not, but that they should worship Allaah, and worship none but Him Alone (abstaining from ascribing partners to Him) [al-Bayyinah 98:5]

"So worship Allaah (Alone) by doing religious deeds sincerely for Allaah's sake only.

Surely, the religion (i.e. the worship and the obedience) is for Allaah only [al-Zumar 39:2-3]

"Say (O Muhammad): 'Verily, my Salaah (prayer), my sacrifice, my living, and my dying are for Allaah, the Lord of the 'Aalameen (mankind, jinn and all that exists).

He has no partner. And of this I have been commanded, and I am the first of the Muslims.'" [al-An'aam 6:162-163]

And Allaah says, addressing His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him)

(interpretation of the meaning):

“Verily, We have granted you (O Muhammad) Al-Kawthar (a river in Paradise).

Therefore turn in prayer to your Lord and sacrifice (to Him only).” [al-Kawthar 108:1-2]

“And the mosques are for Allaah (Alone), so invoke not anyone along with Allaah” [al-Jinn 72:18]

“And whoever invokes (or worships), besides Allaah, any other ilaah (god), of whom he has no proof; then his reckoning is only with his Lord. Surely, Al-Kaafiroon (the disbelievers in Allaah and in the Oneness of Allaah, polytheists, pagans, idolaters) will not be successful” [al-Mu’minoon 23:117]

The same applies in the case of those who make fun of the religion, attack it, mock it and insult it – all of these are forms of major kufr and are things for which none may be excused on the grounds of ignorance, because it is well known in the religion that insulting the religion or insulting the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) are forms of major kufr, as is making fun of the religion or mocking it. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Say: ‘Was it at Allaah, and His Ayaat (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc.) and His Messenger that you were mocking?’

Make no excuse; you disbelieved after you had believed” [al-Tawbah 9:65-66]

It is obligatory for the scholars in every place to spread this knowledge among the people and to make it known so that the common folk will have no excuse and so that this important knowledge will become widespread among them; and so that they will give up their attachment to the dead and seeking help from them whether that is in Egypt, Syria, Iraq or in Madeenah at the grave of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), or in Makkah or anywhere else; and so that the pilgrims and the people will be aware, and will know the laws and religion of Allaah. The silence of the scholars is one of the reasons for the loss and ignorance of the common folk. The scholars, wherever they are, must convey to the people the religion of Allaah and teach them about the unity of Allaah (Tawheed) and the kinds of shirk, so that they will give up shirk out of

understanding and so that they will worship Allaah Alone with understanding. Similarly, they must speak out against the things that happen at the grave of al-Badawi, the grave of al-Husayn (may Allaah be pleased with him), or at the grave of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qaadir al-Jeelani or at the grave of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) in Madeenah and at other graves. The people must know that worship is due to Allaah alone, and no one else has any right to it, as Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And they were commanded not, but that they should worship Allaah, and worship none but Him Alone (abstaining from ascribing partners to Him) [al-Bayyinah 98:5]

“So worship Allaah (Alone) by doing religious deeds sincerely for Allaah’s sake only.

Surely, the religion (i.e. the worship and the obedience) is for Allaah only [al-Zumar 39:2-3]

“And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him” [al-Israa’ 17:23]

i.e., your Lord has commanded. So the duty of the scholars throughout the Muslim world and in the areas where there are Muslim minorities and in every place is to teach the people about the unity of Allaah (Tawheed) and to educate them about the meaning of worshipping Allaah, and to warn them against associating anything with Allaah (shirk), which is the greatest of sins. Allaah has created the two races (of mankind and the jinn) to worship Him, and He has commanded them to do that, as He says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And I (Allaah) created not the jinn and mankind except that they should worship Me (Alone)” [al-Dhaariyaat 51:56]

Worship means obeying Him and obeying His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), devoting worship sincerely and purely to Him, and focusing one’s heart on Him. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“O mankind! Worship your Lord (Allaah), Who created you and those who were before you so that you may become Al-Muttaqûn (the pious)” [al-Baqarah 2:21]

With regard to matters which may be unclear, such as some transactions and some matters of prayer and fasting, the one who is ignorant of them may be excused, as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) excused the man who entered ihraam dressed in a cloak and wearing perfume. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said to him, “Take off the cloak and wash off the perfume, and do in your ‘umrah what you do in your Hajj.” He did not tell him to pay a penalty (fidyah) for his ignorance. By the same token, some matters which may be unclear should be taught to the one who is ignorant so that he will come to understand them. But as far as the basics of ‘aqeedah, the pillars of Islam, and things which are clearly haraam are concerned, claims of ignorance cannot be accepted from anyone who lives among the Muslims. If anyone who lives among the Muslims were to say, “I did not know that zinaa is haraam”, this is no excuse. If he were to say, “I did not know that disobeying my parents is haraam,” this is no excuse; rather he should be beaten and disciplined. Or if he were to say, “I did not know that homosexuality is haraam,” this is no excuse. These are matters which are clear and are well known among the Muslims and in Islam.

But if he lived in a land far away from the Muslim world or in a remote part of Africa where there are no Muslims around him, then the claim of ignorance may be accepted from him, and if he dies in that state his case will rest with Allaah; he will come under the same ruling as those who lived during the fatrah (time between two Prophets). The correct view is that they will be tested on the Day of Resurrection: if they respond and obey they will enter Paradise, and if they disobey they will enter Hell. But the one who lived among the Muslims but did actions of kufr and neglected the well known obligations, has no excuse, because the matter is clear and there are Muslims around him, who fast and perform Hajj. All of this is well known and widespread among the Muslims, so the claim of ignorance in this case is a false claim. And Allaah is the One Whose help we seek.