

# Islam Question & Answer

General Supervisor:  
Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid

## **45200 - Ruling on imitating the kuffaar, and the meaning of the phrase, “What the Muslims think is good is good before Allaah”**

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### **the question**

What is the Islamic ruling on the issue of imitating the kuffaar in their customs and dealings? What are the guidelines concerning that in Islamic sharee’ah? Is every imitation of the actions of the kuffaar regarded as a haraam kind of imitation – knowing that there are many things that the kaafirs do that are not haraam and are not condemned by sharee’ah, where the one who does them does not do them merely to imitate the kuffaar, but because he thinks those things are good, as Ibn Mas’ood (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: “What the Muslims think is good is good before Allaah”?

Please advise us, may Allaah honour you, and please give me a detailed answer and explain to me the guidelines on this matter.

### **Detailed answer**

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The Muslims have no need to imitate any of the other nations in matters of religious rituals and acts of worship, for Allaah has perfected His religion and completed His Favour, and chosen for us Islam as our religion, as He says (interpretation of the meaning):

“This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My Favour upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion”

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[al-Maa'idah 5:3]

Islam forbids the Muslims to imitate the kuffaar, especially the Jews and Christians, but this prohibition does not apply to all their affairs, rather it applies to matters of their religion and things that are unique to them, by which they are known.

It was narrated from Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "You will certainly follow the ways of those who came before you hand span by hand span, cubit by cubit, to the extent that if they entered the hole of a lizard, you will enter it too." We said: "O Messenger of Allaah, (do you mean) the Jews and the Christians?" He said: "Who else?" Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 1397; Muslim, 4822.

This hadeeth indicates that it is haraam to imitate the Jews and the Christians, and that those who follow them and tread the same path as them are criticized. Islam has reinforced this prohibition, by describing those who imitate the kuffaar as being of them.

It was narrated that 'Abd-Allaah ibn 'Umar said: The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "Whoever imitates a people is one of them." Narrated by Abu Dawood, 3512; classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Irwa' al-Ghaleel, 2691.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

This at the very least indicates that it is haraam to imitate them, although the apparent meaning is that the one who imitates them is a kaafir.

Iqtida' al-Siraat al-Mustaqeem, 237.

The one who imitates the kuffaar feels that inferior and defeated, so he hastens to make up for his feelings of inadequacy by imitating those whom he admires. If these people were to ponder the greatness of Islamic sharee'ah and understand how corrupt is that civilization they are running

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after, they would realize that they are doing wrong and that they have forsaken something that is perfect and true for something that is imperfect and corrupt.

Secondly:

The types of imitation which are forbidden to us are many.

Shaykh Saalih al-Fawzaan said:

The things in which the kuffaar are imitated include acts of worship, such as imitating them in matters of shirk, such as building (structures) over graves, building shrines and exaggerating about them. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "May the curse of Allaah be upon the Jews and the Christians, for they took the graves of their Prophets as places of worship." Al-Bukhaari, 425; Muslim, 531. And he told us that when a righteous man among them died, they would build a place of worship over his grave, and install images therein, and that they were the most evil of mankind. Al-Bukhaari, 417; Muslim, 528. Nowadays there are instances of major shirk because of exaggeration concerning graves, as is well known to scholars and ordinary folk alike. The cause of that is imitation of the Jews and Christians.

Another example is their imitation of the festivals of shirk and bid'ah, such as birthday celebrations, whether it is the birthday of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) or the birthdays of presidents and kings. Or these festivals of bid'ah and shirk may be named after days or weeks, such as a country's national day or independence day, or Mother's Day, or hygiene week, and other days or weeks that are celebrated. All of these have come to the Muslims from the kuffaar, for Islam has only two festivals: Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. Anything else is bid'ah and an imitation of the kuffaar.

From a khutbah entitled al-Hathth 'ala Mukhaalafat al-Kuffaar (Exhortation to be distinct from the kuffaar)

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In the answer to question no. [47060](#) we have stated that it is forbidden to imitate the kuffaar in the clothing that is unique to them and in the customs that are unique to them, such as imitating them by shaving the beard.

Thirdly:

The prohibition on imitating the kuffaar applies to their acts of worship and the customs that are unique to them and by which they are distinguished, not the things that they do and invent from which we may benefit. There is no sin on the Muslims if they share in that, rather the Muslims should be in the forefront of such things.

Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen said:

With regard to the phrase "imitation of the kuffaar", that does not mean that we should not use anything that they have manufactured. No one says such a thing. At the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and afterwards the people used to wear clothes made by the kuffaar and use vessels made by them.

Imitation of the kuffaar means imitating their clothing and appearance, and the customs that are unique to them. It does not mean that we should not ride what they ride or wear what they wear. But if they ride in a specific way that is unique to them, then we should not ride in that way. If they tailor their clothes in a certain fashion that is unique to them, we should not do likewise. But if we have cars that are similar to theirs and fabric that is similar to theirs, there is nothing wrong with that.

Majmoo' Fataawa al-Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen, 12, question 177.

And he said:

The definition of imitating is when the imitator does something that is unique to those whom he is

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imitating. Imitation of the kuffaar refers to when a Muslim does something that is one of their unique characteristics. With regard to that which has become widespread among the Muslims and is no longer something by which the kuffaar are distinguished, then this is not imitation of the kuffaar, and it is not haraam because it is an imitation, unless it is haraam for some other reason. What we have said is what is indicated by the meaning of the word tashabbuh (imitation).

Majmoo' Fataawa al-Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen, 12, question 198.

In the answer to question no. [21694](#) you will find a detailed discussion of the ruling on imitating the kuffaar. See question no. [43160](#) for further details.

Fourthly:

There are both beneficial things and harmful things in non-Muslim civilization. We should not ignore the good things and take the harmful things. This attitude was summed up by Shaykh al-Shanqeeti (may Allaah have mercy on him) who said:

Our attitude towards western civilization may be one of four things, and there is no fifth:

1-Ignoring this civilization, good points and bad alike.

2-Adopting it in whole, good points and bad.

3-Adopting the bad things and not the good.

4-Adopting the good things and not the bad.

The first three are undoubtedly wrong and only one of them is undoubtedly good, which is the last one.

Adwa' al-Bayaan, 4/382.

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Fifthly:

With regard to the words of 'Abd-Allaah ibn Mas'ood (may Allaah be pleased with him), "What the Muslims think is good is good before Allaah", this does not refer to things that go against sharee'ah but which may be deemed good on the basis of rational thinking. Imam al-Shaafa'i (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: "Whoever thinks something is good issuing a ruling." It does not refer to when one person thinks a thing is good but the majority of people do not. Rather this phrase may be interpreted in one of two ways, both of which are sound:

- 1 - That what is meant is traditions and customs that do not go against sharee'ah
- 2 - That what is meant is the proof of scholarly consensus, for the Muslims are unanimously agreed that thinking a thing is good is consensus which counts as evidence. So this thing must be good before Allaah as well. This is what is indicated by the words, "What the Muslims think is good."

See al-Mabsoot by al-Sarkhasi, 12/138' al-Faroosiyah by Ibn al-Qayyim, p. 298.

These interpretations mentioned above are applicable if we take the words of Ibn Mas'ood (may Allaah be pleased with him) as applying to all the Muslims in general. But from the context it seems that he is referring to the companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) only, and not others. What Ibn Mas'ood said was: "Allaah looked into the hearts of His slaves and found that the heart of Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) was the best of all His slaves' hearts. So He chose him for Himself and sent him with His Message. Then He looked into the hearts of all His slaves after the heart of Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and He found that the hearts of his companions were the best of all His slaves' hearts, so He made them the helpers of His Prophet, fighting for the sake of his religion. So what the Muslims think is good is good before Allaah and whatever the Muslims think is bad is bad before Allaah."

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Narrated by Ahmad, 3418; classed as saheeh by Shaykh al-Albaani in Takhreej al-Tahhaawiyah, 530.

Whatever the case, it is not correct to quote the words of Ibn Mas'ood (may Allaah be pleased with him) as evidence for thinking as good that which is forbidden in Islam, such as imitating the mushrikeen.

And Allaah knows best.