

# ABU BARAA, MIZANUR RAHMAN AND HIS SELF-SERVING UNDERSTANDING OF ISTIBDĀL

## ANALYSING THE CAUSATIVE FACTOR THAT COMPELS ABU BARAA TO MAINTAIN HIS WARPED UNDERSTANDING OF ISTIBDĀL<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

It is truly telling how someone can quote Islamic text and principles verbatim but in his understanding, methodology and actualisation of certain texts/principles he arrives at conclusions that are completely at odds with the objectives of Islam. One reason for this could be purely based on a lack of understanding due to an absence of knowledge or fiqh. Another reason—which is more sinister and *the* defining factor between persisting upon a false understanding or relinquishing it once understood correctly—is that you manipulate the Islamic text or principles to maintain a dogmatic belief. Shaykh Muhammad ibn Sālih al-‘Uthaymeen provides us a crystal clear concept of how this happens:

ثم شيء آخر نضيفه إلى ذلك وهو: سوء الإرادة التي تستلزم سوء الفهم؛ لأن الإنسان إذا كان يريد شيئاً لزم من ذلك أن ينتقل فهمه إلى ما يريد، ثم يُحرّف النصوص على ذلك. وكان من القواعد المعروفة عند العلماء أنهم يقولون: استدل ثم اعتقد، لا تعتقد ثم تستدل؛ فتضل. فالأسبابُ ثلاثةٌ هي: الأول: قلة البصاعة من العلم الشرعي. الثاني: قلة فقه القواعد الشرعية. الثالث: سوء الفهم المبني على سوء الإرادة.

Moreover, there is something additional to this, and it is that, **evil intent necessitates evil understanding** because when a person has an ardent intent, it forces his understanding to realise his ardent intent, and consequently he distorts the shari’ah text to coincide with his ardent intent. From the principles that are well known to the scholars is the statement, **“gather the evidences and then believe, but do not believe and then conclude from evidences [to validate your belief]”** and thus go

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<sup>1</sup> Paper compiled by Abū Amīnah AbdurRahmān Bennett.

astray. So the causes [for misguidance] are three (1) a deficiency in shari’ah-based knowledge, (2) a deficiency in understanding the shari’ah-based principles and (3) misunderstanding which is predicated on evil intent.<sup>2</sup>

It is a by-product of being human that we are all affected by causes number (1) and (2) because both causes are simply a lack of knowledge or its application, which requires minor corrective surgery. Number (3), however, diagnoses itself as a lack of sincerity which requires major corrective surgery because of its malignant nature. No matter how much knowledge one acquires, if one is governed by “ardent intent”, knowledge that is guided by “ardent intent” will always be corrupted. If a compass is itself faulty, your knowledge of coordinates and orientation will always be (mis)guided by that faulty compass. The faulty compass here equates to a diseased heart and Allah teaches us the consequences of having a diseased heart:

فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ ﴿٧﴾

As for those in whose hearts is deviation [from truth], they will follow that of it which is unspecific, seeking discord and seeking an interpretation [suitable to them]. (7)<sup>3</sup>

From amongst the masses who suffer from a diseased heart is Abu Baraa, MizanurRahman, who is a ‘student’ of Umar Bakri Muhammad (who allegedly was an asset of the British intelligence service)<sup>4</sup> who he studied with at the ‘London School of Shari’ah’. This is the same Abu Baraa who justified the slaughter of Alan Henning<sup>5</sup> because Abu Baraa shares a similar strain of “ardent intent” with the modern-day representatives of the Khawārij, ISIS. Abu Bara has made a bit of a name for himself over the last couple of years by involving himself in the counterproductive, modern-day method of da’wah, which we can call, organised public debating.<sup>6</sup> In two of his most

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<sup>2</sup> This is a comment that the Shaykh makes on a statement that can be found in Shaykh al-Albāni’s book *Fitnah at-Takfir* p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> *Aali Imrān*.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/circus-how-british-intelligence-primed-both-sides-terror-war-55293733>

<sup>5</sup> [http://download.salafimanhaj.com/pdf/SalafiManhaj\\_AbuBaraa.pdf](http://download.salafimanhaj.com/pdf/SalafiManhaj_AbuBaraa.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Organised public debating is a weird method of da’wah because it invites the general masses to give their ears and their hearts to the mesmerising words of a person of innovation and misguidance. Organised public debate has the thrilling punchline of ‘You be the Judge!’ when in reality hardly anyone in the crowd has the requisites to be on the jury, let alone a judge! Moreover, public debating is not really about truth; it is more about the art of one-upmanship which pits one speaker’s wits against his fellow contestant. It is like a coliseum for verbal gladiators but victory here (weirdly) is decided by the partisan crowds and not by those who duelled in the arena. Islam has come to eradicate falsehood and all of its means and not to give it an equal platform from whence it can propagate itself as the truth and thus bewitch the people. Ibn Umar reported that the prophet (*sallallahu alaihi wa sallam*) said, ‘Indeed some eloquence

recent debates, Abu Baraa has tackled a multitude of subjects, stretching from the conditions of *Abil Hal wal Aqd'* to the meaning of *istiblāl* according to the shar'iah. The subject matter of this paper is *Istibdāl/ tabdeel*.

## ABU BARAA AND HIS ISTIBDĀL OF THE SHARI'AH MEANING OF THE TERM 'ISTIBDĀL'

During the organised public debate which took place between AbdurRahmān Hasan and Abu Baraa on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> of December 2014, the issue of *Istibdāl* and its correct shar'iah usage presented itself for debate and AbdurRahmān Hasan threw down the gauntlet with this statement:

**You said that the Jews they did *Istibdāl*... The Jews what did they do? They change the ruling, right? From what? From stoning to what? (Someone in the crowd states "blackening their faces") And he ascribed it [this man-made law] to who? (Someone in the crowd states "Allāh".) To Allāh! Barakallāhu feekum! *That is istibdāl. It is not the fact that a person changed a ruling and left it like that; he has to ascribe it to Allāh. The Jews ascribed it to Allāh. That is called istibdāl... bi ijma'*! (by consensus).**

Abū Baraa responds to AbdurRahmān's speech by stating,

**And to say that *istibdāl* has a condition that you must say "this is from Allāh," this is wrong. This is wrong from the Sahābah because when they (Sahābah) referred to the Jews, when they did this, they did not say that this is from Allāh... The Prophet asked them, "Is this from the Tawrāt?" He said, "No. We changed it when the rich used to be forgiven and the poor used to be punished and so we said, "Why not have something which is for everybody?" They knew they changed it. They knew that they changed it!**

Before we comment on Abu Baraa's statement, let us first remind ourselves of the actual text that both speakers are referring to, paying special attention to the highlighted parts:

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is magic'. Sasa'ah bin Sawhān said, 'The prophet of Allah spoke the truth for indeed, a man may have the truth against him and be less proficient with regards to the evidences than one who has the truth but may enchant the people with his eloquence and so have (in their eyes) the truth!'

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مَرَّ النَّبِيُّ بِيَهُودِيٍّ مُحْمَمٍ مَجْلُودٍ فَدَعَاهُمْ فَقَالَ " هَكَذَا تَجِدُونَ فِي كِتَابِكُمْ حَدَّ الزَّانِي " . قَالُوا نَعَمْ . فَدَعَا رَجُلًا مِنْ عُلَمَائِهِمْ فَقَالَ " أَنْتُنَا بِإِلَهِ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ التَّوْرَةَ عَلَى مُوسَى أَهَكَذَا تَجِدُونَ حَدَّ الزَّانِي قَالَ لَا وَلَوْلَا أَنَّكَ نَسَدْتَنِي لَمْ أُخْبِرَكَ نَجِدُ حَدَّ الزَّانِي فِي كِتَابِنَا الرَّجْمَ وَلَكِنَّهُ كَثُرَ فِي أَشْرَافِنَا فَكُنَّا إِذَا أَخَذْنَا الشَّرِيفَ تَرَكْنَاهُ وَكُنَّا إِذَا أَخَذْنَا الضَّعِيفَ أَقَمْنَا عَلَيْهِ الْحَدَّ . فَقُلْنَا تَعَالَوْا فَلَنَجْتَمِعَ عَلَى شَيْءٍ نُفِيمُهُ عَلَى الشَّرِيفِ وَالْوَضِيعِ فَاجْتَمَعْنَا عَلَى التَّحْمِيمِ وَالْجُلْدِ مَكَانَ الرَّجْمِ . فَقَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَوَّلُ مَنْ أَحْيَا أَمْرَكَ إِذْ أَمَاتُوهُ " . وَأَمَرَ بِهِ فَرَجِمَ .

The Messenger of Allāh passed by a Jew with a blackened face who had been flogged. He called them and said, 'Is this the punishment for the adulterer that you find in your Book?' They said: 'Yes.' Then he called one of their scholars and said: 'I adjure you by Allah, Who sent down the Tawrah to Mūsa! Is this the punishment for the adulterer that you find in your Book?' He said: 'No; if you had not adjured me by Allah (SWT), I would not have told you.' The punishment for the adulterer that we find in our Book is stoning, but many of our nobles were being stoned (because of the prevalence of adultery among them), so if we caught one of our nobles (committing adultery), we would let him go; but if we caught one of the weak among us, we would carry out the punishment on him. We said: "Come, let us agree upon something that we may impose on both noble and weak alike." So we agreed to blacken the face and whip them, instead of stoning.' The Prophet said, 'O Allāh, I am the first of those who revive your command which they had killed off,' and he issued orders that (the man) be stoned."<sup>8</sup>

We learn from the words of Abū Baraa that *istibdāl* is merely to replace a rule of Allāh and that the restrictive clause of attributing this change or replacement to Allāh, whether in word or deed, “**is wrong**”. It is no surprise that Abū Baraa does not bring one statement from the Imāms of Ahlus Sunnah to support his view and that all he relies on is his ‘**ardent**’ understanding of the above hadith. Our brother Abdurrahmān, on the other hand, brings the hadith itself as evidence, a clear statement from Allāh and we will complement these adequate proofs for the heart that places the haqq above everything with statements from the Imāms of Ahlus Sunnah.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://sunnah.com/urn/1326550>

If all we had were Abū Baraa's poorly paraphrased version of the hadīth, Abū Baraa might have a case. However, when we move from Abū Baraa's self-serving version of events to the actual text of the hadīth, we find that its contents present an impressive case against Abū Baraa. Abū Baraa states '**when they did this, they did not say that this is from Allāh**'; however, when the Prophet (*sallallāhu alaihi wa sallam*) asked the Jews '**is this the punishment for the adulterer that you find in your Book?**' they said, '**Yes.**' The Prophet explicitly asked them if this were the rule (blackening the faces) for stoning which they found in their Book and all of them said yes. Is not their 'yes' a clear evidence that they were attributing this man-made law came from Allāh? And given that this law was falsely accredited to their Book, why would they not think or pretend that this is the law of Allāh? Is it not more than obvious that those who wrote this amended law were attempting to pass of this law as a law from Allāh? If this is not the case, then why did they initially say that it was from Allāh?! The sum total of these rhetorical questions clearly prove that they ascribed this amended law to Allāh.

Moving further down the text to the part where our Messenger (*sallallāhu alaihi wa sallam*) questions the learned men from amongst the Jews, we discover that the learned man confesses that this is not the original law written in the Tawrah. However, the term 'confesses' is an important term because the Jew said, "**if you had not adjured me by Allah (SWT), I would not have told you.**" Abu Baraa seems to think that because the learned Jew, under some duress, admitted that this was not the revealed law of Allah that this means that they never ascribed it to Allāh. How does that follow on any plane of logic? The problem here is that because "**evil intent necessitates evil understanding**" Abu Baraa needs to jump through these contradictory hoops to maintain his Khawārijī narrative of what constitutes major kufr. Even when our brother, AbdurRahmān, quoted the following verse of Allāh

﴿۷۹﴾ فَوَيْلٌ لِلَّذِينَ يَكْتُوبُونَ الْكِتَابَ بِأَيْدِيهِمْ ثُمَّ يَقُولُونَ هَذَا مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ

So woe to those who write the "scripture" with their own hands, then say, "This is from Allah,"... (79)

it still was not enough to negotiate him down from the ledge upon which he precariously perches. Feel the contrast: Allāh teaches us one of the traits of the Jews which that is they fabricate scripture and then attribute it to Allāh but Abū Baraa adamantly tells us, against all evidence and logic, that

the Jews did not do it in this instance. Even if the Jews never said with their tongues **"This is from Allah,"** just the amendment made to the Book alone necessitates a clear case of *tabdīl*

Let us now move from the Book and the Sunnah to the statements of those who inherited knowledge of revelation, namely the ‘Ulamā. Abū Baraa does not like it when we refer to the ‘Ulama because he knows that within the words of the Ulamā we get to enforce the following words from our Salaf:

هل تكلم فيه أحد من أصحاب النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم أو أحد من العلماء فإن أصبت فيه أثرا عنهم فتمسك به ولا تجاوزه لشيء ولا تختار عليه شيئا فتسقط في النار .

**Did any of the Companions of Allah’s Messenger speak about it or any of the scholars?** So if you find a narration from them, then hold firmly to it, do not go beyond it for anything or give preference to anything over it and thus fall into the fire.<sup>9</sup>

We will start with a statement from Abū Bakr Ibn ‘Arabi al-Malaki<sup>10</sup> that is so clear in defining *tabdīl* or *istibdāl* that no word of clarification is required before or after it:

إن حكم بما عنده على أنه من عند الله فهو تبديل يوجب الكفر.

**“If he rules by anything which originates from himself, holding that [such rules] come from Allāh then it a *tabdīl* that necessitates kufr.”<sup>11</sup>**

The term **‘holding’** is this domain of the heart and can manifest through the tongue and limbs. However, the least requirement for this kufr to become effective is through mere belief of the heart. Thus, when Abu Baraa states **‘you must say “this is from Allāh,”** we say that verbal articulation is merely manifestation of what a person is **‘holding’** in his heart.

Now we will bring a sequence of statements from Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah that abundantly provide for us types of *tabdīl* and, more importantly, the common denominator that links all types of *tabdīl*.

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<sup>9</sup> *Sharh as-Sunnah*.

<sup>10</sup> Not to be confused with ‘Muhyī ad-Deen’ Ibn Arabi who was declared a heretic by many scholars.

<sup>11</sup> *Abkām al-Qur’ān* (2/624).

وأما ان اضاف أحد إلى الشريعة ما ليس منها من أحاديث مفتراة أو تأول النصوص بخلاف مراد الله ونحو ذلك فلهذا من نوع التبديل.

As for when a person attributes something to the shari'ah that is not from it, such as fabricated hadith, textual interpolations that contradict the intent of Allāh and anything else of a similar nature then this is a type of *tabdīl*.<sup>12</sup>

والثالث الشرع المبدل وهو الكذب على الله ورسوله أو على الناس بشهادات الزور ونحوها والظلم البين فمن قال إن هذا من شرع الله فقد كفر بلا نزاع كمن قال إن الدم والميتة حلال ولو قال هذا مذهبي ونحو ذلك.

The third type [of *tabdīl*] is *Shar' al-Mubaddal*, and it is to lie on Allāh or His Messenger or on the people by giving false testimonies and blatant oppression etc. So whoever says that such and such is from the shari'ah of Allāh then he has indisputably disbelieved, and he is similar to the one who states that [consuming] blood and dead animals is halal, even if he claims that this is his madhhab and whatnot.<sup>13</sup>

وأما الشرع المبدل فمثل الأحاديث الموضوعية والتأويلات الفاسدة والأقيسة الباطلة والتقليد المحرم فهذا يحرم أيضا.

“As for *ash-Shar' al-Mubaddal*, such as fabricated ahādith, corrupted interpretations [of text], false analogy and forbidden blind following then this is forbidden also.”<sup>14</sup>

وأما الشرع المبدل فهو الأحاديث المكذوبة والتفاسير المقلوبة والبدع المضلة التي أدخلت في الشرع وليست منه والحكم بغير ما انزل الله فهذا ونحوه لا يحل لأحد اتباعه.

“As for *ash-Shar' al-Mubaddal* then it includes false ahādith, contradictory Qur'anic exegesis, misleading innovations which are not from it but have been incorporated into the shar'iah and ruling by other than what Allāh has revealed. It is not permissible for anyone to pursue these or similar things.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*

<sup>13</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*

<sup>14</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*

<sup>15</sup> *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*

الثالث الشرع المبدل مثل ما يثبت من شهادات الزور أو يحكم فيه بالجم والظلم بغير العدل والحق حكما بغير ما أنزل الله أو يؤمر فيه بإقرار باطل لإضاعة حق مثل أمر المريض أن يقر لو ارتب بما ليس بحق ليبطل به حق بقية الورثة فإن الأمر بذلك والشهادة عليه محرمة وإن كان الحاكم الذي لم يعرف باطن الأمر إذا حكم بما ظهر له من الحق لم يأنم فقد قال سيد الحكام في الحديث المتفق عليه ( إنكم تختصمون إلى ولعل بعضكم أن يكون الحن بحجته من بعض وإنما أفضى بنحو ما أسمع فمن قضيت له بشيء من حق أخيه فلا يأخذه فإنما أقطع له قطعة من النار.

“The third type is *ash-Shar’ al-Mubaddal*, such as anything that is based on false testimony or a ruling based on ignorance and oppression.”

لكن كثيرا من الناس ينسبون ما يقولونه إلى الشرع وليس من الشرع بل يقولون ذلك إما جهلا وإما غلطا وإما عمدا وإفتراء وهذا هو الشرع المبدل الذي يستحق أصحابه العقوبة ليس هو الشرع المنزل الذي جاء به جبريل من عند الله إلى خاتم المرسلين فإن هذا الشرع المنزل كله عدل ليس فيه ظلم ولا جهل.

However, so many people ascribe what they say to the shari’ah when it is not from the shari’ah. And this is either done out of ignorance, error, purposely or false accusation, and all of this is *ash-Shar’ al-Mubaddal* for which the perpetrator is deserving of punishment. And this is not *ash-Shar’ al-Munazzal* (Revealed law) which Allāh sent Jibrā’eel with. For indeed the revealed law is a completely just law free from any oppression or ignorance.<sup>16</sup>

The common denominator found in all of these statements from Shaykh al-Islām is very easy to spot when we look at all the things he listed as *ash-Shar’ al-Mubaddal*:

- ✓ Lying on Allāh and His Messenger for false testimony
- ✓ Fabricated ahādith
- ✓ Corrupted interpretation [of text].
- ✓ Giving false testimony
- ✓ Misguiding innovations incorporated into the shari’ah
- ✓ Mixing the truth with falsehood

<sup>16</sup> *Majmū’ al-Fatāwā* (35/366)

- ✓ Ascribing to the shar'ah what is not from the shar'iah
- ✓ Making the haram halal

Anyone with a set of eyes can see that the common denominator in all of these things is that they all require alien things to be attributed to the shari'ah of Allāh. We will finish this section with a final statement from Ibn Taymiyyah that clearly shows that *tabdīl* takes place by changing the laws of Allāh and then ascribing them to Allāh by distorting His words from their correct usages:

ولهذا حصل من الذين لبسوا الحق بالباطل تبديل لما بدلوه من الدين وتحريف الكلم عن مواضعه... والتبديل نوعان أحدهما ان يناقضوا خبره والثاني أن يناقضوا أمره فان الله بعثه بالهدى ودين الحق وهو صادق فيما أخبر به عن الله أمر بما أمر الله به كما قال من يطع الرسول فقد أطاع الله وأهل التبديل الذين يضيفون الى دينه وشرعه ما ليس منه وهم أهل الشرع المبدل تارة يناقضونه في خبره فينفون... أهل التبديل الذين يضيفون إلى دينه شرعه ما ليس منه وهم أهل الشرع المبدل.

**And due to this, there ensued from those who mixed the truth with falsehood a *tabdīl* (alteration) of whatever they altered of the religion and distorted of His words from their proper usages... And *tabdīl* is of two types: the first type is to oppose his *khābir* (i.e. beliefs and other knowledge-based facts) and His command... And the people of *tabdīl* are those who add to His religion and His laws things that are not from it. They are the people of ash-Shar' al-Mubaddal.**

Not only have we decidedly learnt that *tabdīl* requires attribution to the shar'iah of Allah either explicitly or implicitly, we have also learned that not all *tabdīl* is major kufr! This just tightens the shackles of captivity around Abu Baraa's wrist and ankles even further! Despite the incontestable evidence that systematically presents itself, Abu Baraa's '**ardent desire**' to preserve his core Khawārijī beliefs is the reason why he cannot submit himself to the evidences. Thus, no matter how much Abu Baraa and his ilk dress up in the garb of Salafiyyah their core Khawārijī beliefs will always 'shine' through. People like Abu Baraa can keep banging at the pristine door of Salafiyyah as much as they like; they will never be granted access until they leave their Khawārijī baggage at its door. Islam requires *تَحْلِيَّةٌ قَبْلَ تَحْلِيَّةٍ* (cleansing before embellishment) in everything, from *'aqidah*

to matters of *busnul kuluq* before you can be (truly) accepted into the contaminated-free zone of Salafiyyah.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Someone here might argue that there are even Salafis that are contaminated with many of the attributes of *hizbiyyah* that are destructive to Salafiyyah. We would apply in the affirmative and then state المسميات لا يلزم ثبوت صفاتها (claiming names does not require confirmation of their qualities). Thus, there is a clear distinction between the terms ‘Salafi’ and ‘Salafiyyah’: one speaks about the label that’s been applied and the other is just a synonym for the Islam that was implemented by the first three generations.