

A Critique of Turki ibn Ali's View on the Takfir of a Ruler Who Does Not Rule by What Allah Has Revealed

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ABSTRACT

Turki bin 'Alī (1984–2017) was one of the most prominent clerics of the takfirī group known as the Islamic State (ISIS). He produced numerous sermons and works aimed at providing a religious veneer for ISIS and its atrocities, including a commentary on Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's the Ten Nullifiers of Islam (al-Nawāqid al-Islāmiyya al-'Ashara). The fourth of these ten nullifiers is "ruling by other than what God has revealed (al-ḥukm bi-ghayr mā anzala Allāh)." From al-Bin 'ālī's perspective, this act possesses six distinct grades. With the exception of the first grade—mere sin—the remaining five, namely: 1) ruling by other than what God has revealed on a specific matter; 2) replacing God's ruling with another; 3) legislating a ruling in place of God's; 4) claiming an absolute right to legislate; and 5) suspending divine rulings by force, all necessitate the legal ruling (hukm fiqhī) of takfir (excommunication) and expulsion from the fold of Islam. This article examines and critiques al-Bin 'ālī's viewpoint using a "descriptive and analytical" methodology. The research findings indicate that al-Bin 'ālī's claim regarding the excommunication of one who rules by other than what God has revealed is, first, fraught with internal contradiction and incoherence, as he should have consistently applied the conditions of istiḥlāl (deeming the forbidden permissible) or istikbār (arrogant refusal) for takfir across all grades of this nullifier. Second, it contravenes the teachings of the Qur'ān and the Sunna concerning the distinction between Islām (submission) and imān (faith), and between doctrinal unbelief (kufr i' tiqādi) and practical unbelief (kufr 'amalī). Third, it is predicated on an unsubstantiated hermeneutical principle that has distanced al-Bin 'ālī from the exegetical tradition of Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamā'a (the Sunni orthodoxy).

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Introduction

This article presents a critical analysis of the views of Turkī al-Bin‘alī (1984–2017), a prominent muftī and ideologue of the takfīrī group ISIS, concerning the Islamic legal concept of *ḥukm bi-ghayr mā anzal Allāh* (ruling by other than what God has revealed). Al-Bin‘alī authored numerous works and delivered speeches to theologically justify the actions and atrocities of ISIS. Among these is his commentary on Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb's renowned treatise, *Nawāqid al-Islām al-‘Asharah* (The Ten Nullifiers of Islam). This study focuses on al-Bin‘alī's exposition of the fourth nullifier, *ḥukm bi-ghayr mā anzal Allāh*, which he categorizes into six distinct degrees. He contends that, with the exception of the first degree (classified as a mere sin), all other manifestations of this act constitute major disbelief (*kufīr akbar*), leading to the perpetrator's excommunication (*takfīr*) from Islam. These advanced degrees include: ruling in a specific case contrary to God's law, systematically substituting divine law, legislating laws to replace God's law, claiming the absolute right to legislate, and forcibly suspending the implementation of divine ordinances.

Methodology

The research method employed in this paper is descriptive and analytical. It involves a systematic description and rigorous critical examination of al-Bin‘alī's theological arguments, jurisprudential reasoning, and exegetical methodology concerning the concept of ruling by non-divine law.

Findings

The research reveals that al-Bin‘alī's claims regarding the *takfīr* of one who rules by other than what God has revealed are predicated on three fundamental flaws:

1. **Internal Contradiction and Incoherence:** A significant inconsistency exists in al-Bin‘alī's framework. For the first degree of *ḥukm bi-ghayr mā anzal Allāh* (i.e., common sins), he stipulates that *takfīr* is only applicable if the act is accompanied by *istiḥlāl* (the belief that the forbidden act is permissible). However, for the subsequent degrees, he dismisses this requirement, deeming the mere commission of the act sufficient for excommunication. This contradictory approach is logically untenable; if creedal assent (*istiḥlāl*) is a necessary condition for pronouncing *takfīr* upon a sinner, it is inconsistent to waive this condition for other forms of ruling by non-divine law. If al-Bin‘alī were to consistently apply the condition of *istiḥlāl* or conscious defiance (*istikbār*), he would be unable to declare *takfīr* upon many Muslim rulers who, while acknowledging the sanctity of divine law, may violate it due to negligence or worldly desires.

2. **Conflict with the Qur'an and Prophetic Sunnah:** This flaw arises from al-Bin'ālī's conflation of the distinct concepts of *Islām* (submission) and *īmān* (faith), and his failure to differentiate between *kufr i'tiqādī* (disbelief of creed, or *kufr akbar*) and *kufr 'amalī* (disbelief of action, or *kufr aṣghar*). The Qur'an establishes *Islām* as a broader category than *īmān*; submission to God is achieved through the verbal profession of faith (*shahādatayn*), whereas true faith is manifested through actions. Similarly, scripture and prophetic traditions distinguish between major disbelief, which is antithetical to *Islām*, and minor disbelief, which is antithetical to the perfection of *īmān* but does not expel an individual from the fold of Islam. By treating all forms of *kufr* as major creedal disbelief, al-Bin'ālī erroneously issues rulings of apostasy. According to established Islamic sources, an individual who has pronounced the *shahādatayn* cannot be declared a disbeliever (*kāfir*) solely for the act of ruling by non-divine law, nor can their life be deemed forfeit.
3. **Reliance on Unfounded Exegetical Principles:** Al-Bin'ālī bases his arguments on unsound interpretive rules, notably a principle he incorrectly attributes to Ibn Taymiyyah, which claims that the term *kufr*, when appearing with the definite article 'al-' (e.g., *al-kāfirūn*), exclusively denotes major disbelief (*kufr akbar*). This is a misrepresentation of Ibn Taymiyyah's position, who himself interpreted Qur'an 5:44—a key verse in this debate—as pertaining specifically to the Jews and did not sanction its use for the blanket *takfir* of Muslims. Furthermore, from a grammatical perspective, the definite article in this context functions as a relative pronoun (*al-maṣūl al-ismī*) and does not signify the ultimate degree of disbelief. This exegetical premise is therefore inconsistent with the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and the established views of early Muslim scholars and classical grammarians.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper demonstrates that Turkī al-Bin'ālī's extremist interpretation of *ḥukm bi-ghayr mā anzal Allāh* is fundamentally at odds with the established exegetical principles of Ahl al-Sunnah, authentic prophetic narrations, and accepted linguistic and grammatical norms. The primary deficiencies in his thesis are his failure to maintain the critical distinction between creedal disbelief and practical disbelief, and his unwarranted generalization of rulings specific to polytheism (*shirk*) to actions that may arise from error, ignorance, or personal weakness, without necessarily

nullifying an individual's Islam. This approach disregards the rich interpretive and jurisprudential heritage of Sunni Islam and ultimately serves to legitimize the widespread and indiscriminate excommunication (*takfir*) of Muslims.

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