

The Firaq Ḥadīth amongst the Shī'īs¹ and Their Treatment of It

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Abstract: *This article describes the value of the firaq ḥadīth according to the views of the Shī'ī authors who had included this ḥadīth in their books. The method of enquiry would be first to determine whether this same firaq ḥadīth exist in the major collections of the Shī'a and its variants; to locate and translate them, and to find out the views of Shī'ī scholars regarding them.*

Keywords: *Shī'ī firaq ḥadīth, Shī'ī scholars.*

Abstrak: *Artikel ini menggambarkan nilai dari ḥadīts firaq menurut pandangan para penulis Syī'ah, yang telah memasukkan ḥadīth ini ke dalam buku-buku mereka. Tulisan ini berupaya meneliti tentang ḥadīth firaq tersebut yang terdapat dalam kumpulan-kumpulan Ḥadīth Syī'ah lainnya, dan bagaimana variasi itu terjadi, kemudian menerjemahkan itu semua, sekaligus menemukan pandangan-pandangan para sarjana Syī'ah mengenai ḥadīts-ḥadīts firaq itu.*

Kata Kunci: *Ḥadīth firaq menurut Syī'ah, sarjana Syī'ah.*

Introduction

A lot has been said regarding the *ḥadīth* of *firaq* or the 73 sects *ḥadīth*. However it is found that this *ḥadīth* has been treated mainly by the scholars of the *Ahl al-Sunna*. The scholars of *Ḥadīth* have treated this *ḥadīth* with caution some verifying it and some others rejecting it commenting on its authenticity.² Other scholars have used this *ḥadīth* in their writings of *firaq* within Islam. Scholars starting with al-Ash‘arī (324 H.), also a *mutakkallim*, has used this *ḥadīth* to vilify other sects of the Muslims most especially the Shī‘īs. ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī,³ Ibn Ḥazm al-Zāhirī⁴ and last but not least al-Sharastānī, the author of *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*. They have all used this *ḥadīth* to classify the sects within Islam into the 72 sects that are bound to hell. In fact this classification was the main aim of their *firaq* books i.e. to find out who are those 72 sects which are in hell.

The *firaq* authors amongst the Shī‘īs have all not discussed nor mentioned this *ḥadīth*.⁵ Is it because such *ḥadīth* did not exist during their lifetime or was it not suitable for the purpose of the writings of their books in discussing *firaq* of the Shī‘īs? Unlike their *Sunnī firaq* writers, early Shī‘ī writers have mainly concentrated on the Shī‘ī *firaq* only and not included the *Ahl al-Sunnah* when discussing the theological differences within the Islamic schools. Furthermore their aim was different from their *Sunnī* counterparts. Where the aim of the *Ahl al-Sunnah firaq* writers were to outlined orthodoxy, the Shī‘a were more concerned with the development of the sect after the death of each infallible Imam of the Shī‘a. This includes providing historical detail on why and which sect had emerged after the death of each of the 11 Imams of the *Ahl al-Bayt*. Therefore these writers had concentrated mainly on the name of the originator of each of these sects and when they had existed.

This article will focus on the value of the *firaq ḥadīth* according to the views of the Shī‘ī authors who had included this *ḥadīth* in their books. The method of enquiry would be first to determine whether this same *firaq ḥadīth* exists in the major collections of the Shī‘a and its variants; to locate and translate them, and to find out the views of Shī‘ī scholars regarding them.

The *Ḥadīth* as Found in Shī'ī Books of *Ḥadīth*

The Shī'īs like their Sunnī counterparts also have books of *Ḥadīth*. The main books of *Ḥadīth* of the Shī'īs are the four books or the *al-Kutub al-Arba'a*.⁶ They are: *Al-Kāfī fī 'Ilm al-Dīn* by al-Kulaynī (329 H.), *Man Lā Yahduruhu al-Faqīh* by al-Shaykh al-Sadūq⁷ (329 H.), *Al-Istibṣār fī ikhtilāf al-Akhhbār* by Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (460 H.), *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* by Shaykh al-Ṭūsī (460 H.).

These four books were collected and compiled by their authors as representing the most authentic according to the criteria set by them. A point of note however contemporary scholars are have all used their own criteria when judging the *Ḥadīth* contained in these four books. The authenticity of the *Ḥadīth* in these four books has been a matter of debate amongst the Shī'ī scholars throughout ages. Some though a minority has taken them all to be authentic however the rest or a great majority of the Shī'ī scholars have all denied the wholesome authenticity of the *Ḥadīth* contained therein. Their main argument being that each scholar has their own method and criteria in accepting a *Ḥadīth* as authentic thus we also have to have our own method in accepting them.⁸

Coming back to the issue at hand, the *ḥadīth* of 73 sects does not appear in any of these collections except for a *ḥadīth* mentioned in *al-Kāfī*:

*Muḥammad ibn Yahyā from Abī 'Īsā from ibn Maḥbūb from Jamīl ibn Ṣāliḥ from Abī Khālid al-Kābalī from Abī Ja'far (a.s), he said: "Allah sets a parable: There is a slave in whom there are several partners differing with one another (mutashākis), and there is another slave wholly owned by one man. Are the two 'Alīke in condition? (All) praise is due to Allah. Nay! Most of them do not know" (QS. Al-Zumar: 30).*⁹

As for those who because the first, and in this they are cursed some of them amongst the others and released some of them from others, therefore as for one owned wholly by the one person, surely he is the first in truth and he is Shī'ī.

Surely the Jews were divided after Moses to 71 sects, one in heaven and 70 sects in hell, the Christians were divided after Jesus to 72 sects, one sect in heaven and 71 in hell, this *ummah* was divided

to 73 after its Prophet upon 73 sects, 72 sects in hell and one sect in heaven, and from the 73 sects, 13 sects tend to accept our authority (*wilāyatunā*) and (tend) to love us, 12 sects from it in hell and one in heaven, and 60 sects from the ways of the people in the hell.¹⁰

Looking at the *ḥadīth* one can clearly see that it is not reported from the companions of the Prophet nor from the Prophet himself but from his great-great-grandson or the fifth Imam of the Shī'ī i.e. Muḥammad al-Baqīr (d. 114 A.H.) Also the content of the *ḥadīth* is telling us the differences between a person believing in one God and the polytheist as Abī Ja'far or Muḥammad al-Baqīr, the fifth Imām of the Shī'ī was quoting the *āyah* (verse) to prove his point.

Another version of this discussion appeared in the collections of *Ḥadīth* by Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī or Shaykh al-Sadūq (d. 329 A.H.)

Reported to us from Abū Naṣr Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Tamīm al-Sirkhissī, he said: Reported to us Abū Labīd Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāmī, he said: Reported to us from Ishāq ibn Isrā'īl he said: Reported to us from 'Abd al-Raḥman ibn Muḥammad al-Miḥārabī he said: Reported to us al-Ifriqī from 'Abdullāh ibn Yazīd from 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar he said: Rasullullah said: Will come upon my ummah similar to what had come to Banī Isrā'īl. Surely they were divided to 72 sects (millah) and my ummah will be divided to 73 sects (millah) (which is) an increase one from (the Banī Isrā'īl); All of them in the hell except one. He (the narrator) said: The companion asked: O Prophet of God, which one of them? He said: The way we are today, me and my companions (mā nahnu 'alayh al-yawm anā wa-aṣḥābī).¹¹

Here the *ḥadīth* is narrated from 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar who reported it from the Holy Prophet himself. However in this version the divisions of the Christians are not mentioned. Instead the ummah of Islam is likened to the Jews. Interestingly the number of the Jewish sects rise by one to 72 unlike other reports which says that they were divided to 71 sects and 72 sects are mainly projected to symbolise the divisions amongst the Christians. Also of interest if Shaykh Sadūq's inclusion of this *ḥadīth* in his collection of *Ma'ānī al-Akḥbār* (meanings of the reports) when it clearly states the answer favourable to the *Ahl al-Sunnah* i.e. the way of me and my companions.

Al-Shaykh al-Sadūq also has mentioned some two other *ḥadīth* which are similar to the 73 sets of the Muslims in his other work i.e. *al-Khisāl*.

Reported to us from Abū Aḥmad Muhammad ibn Jaʿfar al-Bandar al-Shāfiʿī he said: Reported to us from Mujāhid ibn Aʿyān ibn Dāwud he said: Reported to us from Muhammad ibn al-Faḍl he said: Reported to us from Ibn Lahīʿa from Saʿīd ibn Abī Hilāl from Anas ibn Mālik he said: Rasulullah (s.a.w.a) said: Surely Banī Isrāʾīl were divided after Jesus to 71 sects, 70 sects destroyed and 1 sect saved, and surely my umma will be divided to 72 sects, 71 sects are destroyed and 1 sect is saved, they said: O Prophet of Allah who are from that sect? He said: the community, the community, the community (al-jamāʿah, al-jamāʿah, al-jamāʿah)

Said the compiler of this book (r.a.): The *Jamāʿa* are the people of truth and surely they are few (in numbers), surely it is narrated from the Prophet surely he said: “The muʾmin are united in their proofs (*ḥujjah*) and the muʾmin are united in *jamāʿah*.”¹²

The second *ḥadīth* quoted is:

Reported to us from Aḥmad ibn Muhammad ibn al-Ḥaythām al-Ijlī (r.a) said: reported to us from Abū al-Abbās Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā ibn Zakariyā al-Qaṭṭān said: Reported to us from Bakr ibn ʿAbdillāh ibn Ḥabīb said: Reported to us from Tamīm ibn Behlul said: Reported to us Abū Muʿawiyah, from Sulaymān ibn Mehran from Jaʿfar ibn Muḥammad from his father from his grandfather from his father al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib (a.s) he said: I heard from Rasulullah (s.a.w.a) he says: Surely the umma of Moses divided after him to 71 sects, from them one sect is successful and 70 in hell; the ummah of Jesus (a.s) divided after him upon 72 sects, a sect from them are successful and 71 of them in hell, and surely my ummah will divide after me upon 73 sects, a sect from them succeeds and 72 in hell.”¹³

Other than Shaykh Sadūq the *ḥadīth* of 73 sects is also mentioned in latter books of *Ḥadīth* i.e. *Bihar al-Anwar* of al-Majlisī (d. 1111 A.H./1700 A.D.)¹⁴ The *Bihar* as it is normally known is a collection of *Ḥadīth* dealing with all aspects of Islam. It is an encyclopaedic compilation of Imamite traditions which includes the four books, early works of tafsīr of the Shīʿīs as well as other reports by al-Majlisī.

It has been printed so many times and amounts to 110 volumes.¹⁵ Of note however as well as the four books of *Ḥadīth*, Shī'a scholars have casted more doubts on the contents of *Ḥadīth* in the *Behar* due to the breadth of the work.

The traditions in this discussion that are found in the *Behar* are given below:

From Muhammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Behlul, from Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Darīr, from Aḥmad ibn Muhammad, from Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā, from Ismā'īl ibn Abān, from Yūnus ibn Arqam, from Abī Hārūn al-'Abdī, from Abī 'Aqīl who said: We were with Amīr al-Mu'minīn 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (a.s) and he said: Surely this umma will divide to 73 sects (firqah) and by Him who holds my life in His hands, surely all of them are in error (ḍālla) except for my followers and they are my shī'as (shī'atī).¹⁶

This *ḥadīth* is also mentioned by a fifth century scholar who was also the teacher for al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī and considered to be the first scholar to formulate Shī'ī *uṣūl fiqh*.¹⁷ He was Muhammad ibn Nu'mān or better known as al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 413 A.H.) As noted this *ḥadīth* has been mentioned by him in meetings with his students during the month of Ramadan in the fifth century Hijra which later were recorded in the book *al-'Amalī*. So this *ḥadīth* has been accepted by the most learned Shī'ī scholar of the fifth century. Thus analysing this *ḥadīth* is of utmost importance.

First of all this *ḥadīth* has been reported from Amīr al-Mu'minīn 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib or the first Imam for the Imamites Shī'ī and we know that al-Mufid was an Imamite scholar of the fifth century in Baghdad during the Buwayhid dynasty. Secondly this *ḥadīth* is to affirm the salvation for the followers of Shī'ism (Imamite?) only and none other. Thirdly this *ḥadīth* does not mention the various divisions amongst the Christians and the Jews as seen in the other versions.

Was al-Mufid aware of the *ḥadīth* mentioned by Shaykh Sadūq and al-Kulaynī in their works? If he was did he accept it? This cannot be answered directly as this would entail a research into all of Shaykh al-Mufid's works.

However one thing is for sure and has been accepted by modern scholars and that is, Shaykh al-Mufid was against the scholars of

Qumm and Rayy as they were the traditionists and Mufid was more inclined towards rationalism¹⁸ and deductive reasoning in legal matters.¹⁹ Therefore in order to break this dominance amongst the Shī'ī scholarship, Mufid attacked them harshly “and even accused the Qummiyyūn of being religious deviationists”.²⁰ This could probably explain to us the attitude of al-Mufid towards his teacher Shaykh al-Sadūq thus his non-acceptance of the *ḥadīth* as recorded in *al-Kāfi* as well as *al-Khisāl* etc.

There are other reports in the *Behar* which are listed below:

Reported by Ibn Baṭrīq (raḥimahullāh) from tafsir al-Tha'labī for the tafsir of the āya:

“Surely they who divided their religion into parts and became sects” (al-An'ām: 159).

*With the isnād from Dhadhan Abī Amr who said: 'Alī said to me: Abā Amr, do you know how many (sects) were divided from the Jews? He said: Allah and the Prophet knows best. He said: The Jews were divided to 71 sects, all of them in al-Hāwiyah except one and it is successful; Do you know how many (sects) were divided from the Christians? He said: Allah and the Prophet know best. He said: They were divided to 72 sects, all of them in al-Hāwiyah except one, and it is successful; Do you know how many were divided from this umma? He said: Allah knows best. He said: They were divided to 73 sects all of them in al-Hāwiyah except one it is the successful one and you are from them, O Abā Amr.*²¹

This *ḥadīth* most probably is the closest *ḥadīth* to the one narrated by the Ahl Sunnah. However the emphasis is still upon mentioning the fact that the Shī'īs are the saved sect. Though this *ḥadīth* mentions the divisions amongst the Jews and Christians following in the framework of the *ḥadīth* in the Ahl al-Sunnah books it is still not free from ambiguity. The term “*Allah wa Rasūluhu a'lam*” (Allah and the Prophet knows best) normally appears in the dialogues amongst the companions with the Holy Prophet and it is not known to appear in reports by the companions of the first Imam of the Shī'īs. As none of the Imāmiyya called 'Alī as the Prophet unless he is a *ghulat* (extremist).²²

Other variations of the *ḥadīth* are reported in *Behar* were collected

from *Kitāb Sulaym ibn Qays al-Hilālī*.²³ Sulaym was a companion to at least 4 Imams of the Shī'ī from the first i.e. 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 36 A.H.) to the fourth i.e. 'Alī ibn Ḥusayn al-Sajjād (d.? A.H.) His book contains many reports regarding the events of *Thaqīfah* and other historical materials. Scholars have mainly casted doubts on the authenticity of the book due to it being narrated by Abān ibn Abī Ayāsh and also contained many additions and contain a mixture of reports including authentic and unauthentic traditions.²⁴

From Kitāb Sulaym:

With its isnād been deleted to Sulaym ibn Qays, he said: We entered upon 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (a.s) in mosque of Kūfa, the people were around him when the chiefs of the Jews and the Christians entered it. They gave their salutations and sat down. He said to the Jamā'a: By Allah upon you O our Mawlā, ask them until you know what they believe in? He (a.s) asked to the head of the Jews: O my Jewish Brother! He said: I am here for you, He (a.s): Upon how many divisions are the umma of your Prophet? He said: it has been upon the clear book. He (a.s) said: May Allah kills your people and their leaders. He asked them regarding their religion and they answered it is in the clear book.

Then he turned to the head of the Christians and he said to them: How many divisions are the umma of your Prophet? He said upon such and such then it stopped, then 'Alī (a.s) said: If you said as your friend said it would be much better for you than saying and making error and you don't know.

Then he (a.s) approaches the gathering and said: O People! I know (a'lam) better the Tawrat than the ahl al-Tawrat, I know better the Injil than the ahl al-Injil, and I know the Qur'an more than the ahl al-Qur'an. I know (a'rif) the divisions of the umma as it has been mentioned to me by my brother, my beloved and the light of my eyes, Prophet of Allah (s.a.w.a) where he said: "The Jews were divided to 71 sects, 70 sects in hell and 1 sect in heaven which followed its successor (wasiyyuhu); the Christians were divided to 72 sects, 71 sects in hell and one sect in heaven and it is which followed its successor; my umma will divide upon 73 sects, 72 in hell and one in heaven and it is which followed my successor, and he struck my shoulders with his hand.

After this (action) he said: (the) 72 sects did not give their agreement (‘uqd) to you, and (the) 1 sect in heaven it is which gave their love to you and they are your followers (shī’atuka).²⁵

We’ve seen the various different followers versions of ḥadīth with the theme of the saved sect, now we have to turned to contemporary Shī’ī scholars treatment of the ḥadīth.

Treatment of the Saved Sect Ḥadīth by Contemporary Shī’ī Scholars

Now we shall look at the treatment of such Ḥadīth in the books of two contemporary Shī’ī scholars i.e. ‘Allāma Ṭabāṭabā’ī and Shaykh Ja‘far Subḥānī. The former in his *al-Mīzān fī Tafīr al-Qur’ān*²⁶ has mentioned the ḥadīth of the saved sect. The latter has treated the issue of Muslim sects in his 12 voluminous volumes of *Buḥūth fī al-Mīlāl wa al-Niḥāl*.²⁷

In his tafsir of ayat 102 of sura Ālu ‘Imrān, Ṭabāṭabā’ī mentions the importance the Qur’ān had placed on the issue of unity and how it had warned Muslims from disunity,

Why? Because it knew which path this ummah would take; they would differ, disagree and disunite not only as the previous people did, but even more... This difference and disunity was foretold by the Prophet as well as by the Qur’ān; he said that differences would creep into his umma, then it would raise its head in the form of divergent sects; also he prophesised that the umma would become divided as the Jews and the Christians were before. Some of those prophecies will be given under “traditions”. History testifies to the truth of this Prophecy. No sooner was the Prophet gone than the people scattered in all directions; they were divided into several sects, each accusing others of apostasy.²⁸

To Ṭabāṭabā’ī, this problem can be attributed to the existence of the munāfiqs as mentioned by the Qur’ān in several suras specifically the sura al-Munāfiqūn. These hypocrites existed during the time of the Prophet however Ṭabāṭabā’ī expresses his amazement at the fact that at the death of the Prophet these hypocrites just disappeared or vanished!²⁹

Looking at the section on traditions we find that Ṭabāṭabā’ī mentions the tradition found in *al-Khisāl* above. He does mention the fact that the Shī’a have narrated it in a different way from the way

the Sunnīs.³⁰

Interestingly he mentions the tradition as narrated in books of Sunnī scholars i.e. Abū Dāwud, al-Tirmīdhī, Ibn Mājah and al-Ḥakīm.³¹

He agrees with the *ḥadīth* even though it is quoted by Sunnī authorities and interestingly he doesn't mention the *ḥadīth* that is found in the Shī'ī collections except for the two *ḥadīths* found in *al-Khisāl* of al-Sadūq. He accepts the *ḥadīth* as mentioned but the discussion slowly lead to the Shī'ī point of view i.e. the divine authority of the Imams. He mentions the *ḥadīth* that points to the fact that the Muslims would follow the customs of those before them i.e. the Jews and the Christians then rather strangely he follows it up with a *ḥadīth* quoting from *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī and Muslim*:

Anas said: The Messenger of Allah said: "Surely there will arrive at the reservoir (kawthar) a group of my companions until they shall be removed (from there) they shall tremble before me." So I shall say: O Lord! My companions! Then it will be said: "You do not know what they did after you."

Then so as to make clear his point he quotes another *ḥadīth* from the two *Ṣaḥīḥ*:

Abū Hurayra said that the Messenger of Allah said: "There will arrive near me on the Day of Resurrection a group of my companions (or according to another report: of my ummah), and they will be evicted from the Kawthar. Then I will say: "O Lord! My companions! And Allah will say: "You have no knowledge of what they did after you, they became apostates, going backwards (to their previous disbelief)." Then they will be evicted."³²

Ṭabāṭabā'ī said:

These traditions numerous and varied as they are confirm what we have inferred from the verses; and the historical events and strives confirm these traditions.³³

Then he continues citing traditions from *al-Ḍurr al-Manṣūr* regarding the death of Jahilīya for anyone not knowing the Imam of his time.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī's treatment of these *ḥadīths* is similar to their treatment by his Sunnī counterparts whom have always used these *ḥadīths* to justify or to project that their sect is the correct one. In the Shī'ī

case it is seen that these *ḥadīths* at least for Ṭabāṭabā‘ī represent the necessity to follow the Imams as a saviour from error or falling into those sects that had diverted from the *jamā‘ah*. However regarding the authenticity of the variations of *ḥadīth* in the books of the *Shī‘ī*, Ṭabāṭabā‘ī is silent.

Another contemporary scholar, Shaykh Ja‘far Subḥānī deals with the *ḥadīth* more critically than Ṭabāṭabā‘ī. After mentioning the necessity of pursuing an unbiased research on each sects that had existed in Islam he proceeds to discuss the *ḥadīth* of the 73 sects which have been the backbone for *firaq* writings amongst the Ahl al-Sunnah scholars. Unlike Ṭabāṭabā‘ī who have wholeheartedly accepted the *ḥadīth* as narrated in Sunnī works, Subḥānī conducts a research on the *ḥadīth* from 4 main angles:

The ḥadīth as it is from a ṣaḥīḥ sanad, can it be used as ḥujja or not?

Which of the ḥadīth has been mentioned by the Prophet? As there are many of them which are different in its content or matn.

*Which is the *firqa al-nājiyya* as mentioned by in the ḥadīth?*

Is it only 72 sects that have appeared? And do they all still exist in today’s world?³⁴

On the first point Subḥānī mentions the fact that not all scholars concur on the authenticity of such a *ḥadīth*. As to those scholars which do not agree with the authenticity of the *ḥadīth* he mentions Ibn Ḥazm³⁵ regarding the *ḥadīth* as *khabar al-wāḥid* therefore not as a *ḥujja* and al-Dhahabī³⁶ also not using the *ḥadīth* as a *ḥujjah*. In the end of this section he mentions in passing the *Shī‘ī* scholars al-Sadūq and al-Majlisī who have mentioned the *ḥadīth* in their respective works which we have translated above. He concludes by saying that due to the large amount of the *ḥadīth* of *firaq*, thus it would allow us to use it as an argument. He then continues in mentioning the various disagreements the *ḥadīth* had with each other i.e. on the points of the number of the sects which are different from one *ḥadīth* to another, the difference in number of the *firqah nājiyyah* and the difference of view regarding who the saved sect is or are, some say it is the *jamā‘ah*, some say those which make haram the halal and make halal the haram, some mentions *hum anā wa-syi‘atī* (they are me and

my shī'as).

All this according to *Subḥānī* points to the fact of *ikhtilāf* in between the *naṣṣ* or the *ḥadīths*. He then moves on to the third point i.e. which is the *firqā nājiyya*? He quotes Muhammad 'Abduh who said that the meaning of the *ḥadīth* regarding these sects is not clear and is ambiguous. Then *Subḥānī* continues the discussion regarding the *ḥadīth* mentioning the *firqah nājiyah* as *al-jamā'ah* or as those who follow me and my companions (*mā anā 'alayhi wa-aṣḥābī* or *mā anā 'alayhi al-yawm wa aṣḥābī*).

Regarding the first he views them as not being clear. It is to the second that he focuses and analyses deeply. To him the criteria for *najat* and the bordering of *halak* have to be by the person of the Prophet and not his companions. He even questions the inclusion of the companions in the saying of the Prophet due to the possibility of them making errors. Thus how could they be the measure for being saved or being condemned to hell?

The third point he uses to refute this saying is the fact this saying (*mā anā 'alayhi wa aṣḥābī*), assumes the companions not having any differences between them however *Subḥānī* mentions this is not the case as the companions disagreed at the *Thaqīfah* and also majority of the companions went against the third caliph 'Uthmān. Therefore to *Subḥānī*, it is clear that only through the guidance from the Prophet that can be the measure for the being in *firqah nājiyah*.³⁷

The so as to strengthened his point on the companions, he is like Ṭabāṭabā'ī before him, quotes two traditions regarding the state of the companions of the Prophet in the day of Judgment i.e. how they will be separated from the Holy Prophet at *Ḥawḍ* due to them diverted from the path of the Prophet.

From here he then refutes 'Abduh in regard to the latter saying the *ḥadīth* of sects is ambiguous and not clear. *Subḥānī* criticises 'Abduh for not looking at other *naṣṣ* of the Prophet in order to make the *ḥadīth* not ambiguous and clearer. He then quotes the *naṣṣ* or traditions from the Prophet regarding the exhortation of the Prophet for the umma to hold to his Ahl al-Bayt. He quotes the *ḥadīth* of *thaqalayn* as it is recorded by *Sunnī* scholars themselves.

O People, I am leaving to you something that will save you from

*error if you hold on to them: Kitābullāh wa itrati Ahl al-Bayt (the Book of Allah and my Itrah or my family).*³⁸

Another version:

*I leave amongst you my successor: the Book of God, the rope linking the heavens and the earth; and my 'itrah my Ahl al-Bayt. Both of them will not separate from each other until they meet me at Hawd.*³⁹

Subḥānī mentions the fact that these variations are due to the Prophet mentioning them at various places but they do not conflict with each other as the main point is still the same i.e. holding fast to the Qur'ān and the Ahl al-Bayt of the Prophet will guarantee salvation.

Thus Subḥānī concludes that it is by holding to these two will we be in the *firqah nājiyah* and by abandoning them or by going forth from them is the criteria for being in halak or destruction.⁴⁰

The discussion then continues by quoting other *ḥadīth* which basically emphasises the same point. After this discussion, Subḥānī then continues to discuss the fourth discussion as he outlined at the beginning of the chapter i.e. the veracity of the number of sects mentioned in the *ḥadīth*. Is it 72 sects and do they still exist in today's world? Which doesn't concern us here.

It is clear from the preceding discussions that the *firaq ḥadīth* has not been treated fully by the Shī'ī scholars unlike their Sunnī counterparts. These *ḥadīths* nevertheless do appear in the Shī'ī books of *Ḥadīth* however the authenticity of some of them is questionable. Probably this is why most Shī'ī scholars have not discussed them in their books.

Another possible reason for such an attitude can be attributed to the tendency of various commentators of the *ḥadīth* amongst the Ahl al-Sunna to do *takfir* on other sects especially the Shī'ī as being one of the 72 sects that ends up in hell.

Conclusion

Upon a brief investigation Ṭabāṭabā'ī and Subḥānī has turned the *ḥadīth* to their own advantage. They have ingeniously mentioned the falsity of the *mā anā 'alayhi wa aṣḥābī* as being the criteria for the

saved sect and projected the following of the Ahl al-Bayt as being the only criteria of *firqah nājiyah*. This has been the common tendency of many contemporary Shī'ī scholars when confronted with this *ḥadīth*. As to whether this *ḥadīth* in its many versions as recorded in the books of the Shī'ī themselves is accepted or not is not answered directly.⁴¹

Endnotes

- ¹ By Shī'ī we mean here the follower of the twelve Imams of the Holy Prophet's Household. They are also called the Imamites or Imāmiyya Shī'a. See Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Shi'ite Islam*, trans. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1975) for a detailed exposition of the meaning Shī'ism, written by an Imamite Shī'ī scholar.
- ² See for instance the discussion in *Kashf al-Khaffā'*.
- ³ See *Al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*
- ⁴ See his *al-Faṣl fi al-milal wa-al-ahwā' wa-al-nihal*
- ⁵ See Nawbakhti's *Firaq al-Shī'a*, which has been translated into English as *Shī'a Sects* (London: ICAS Press, 2007).
- ⁶ For a brief introduction to all of these four books including a brief look at their contents see I.K.A. Howard's articles which originally appeared in *al-Serat Journal*. This journal is a discontinued journal however the articles are accessible online at www.al-islam.org/journals/al-serat.
- ⁷ Both al-Kulaynī and al-Sadūq are considered to be traditionist who did not practice independent reasoning or *ijtihād*. They stuck to the letters of the *Ḥadīth* in expressing their legal views thus they are similar to the Sunnī school of traditionist i.e. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. However they did examine the transmitters of the *Ḥadīth* quoted in their works extensively in contrast to the extreme traditionist tendencies amongst the Shī'ī scholar of the 4th century H. See Hossein Modarressi Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *An Introduction to Shī'ī Law* (London: Ithaca Press, 1984), 32-33. Hereafter cited as *An Introduction*.
- ⁸ For more detailed discussion regarding this see Abū al-Hādī al-Faḍlī, *ʿIlm dirāya al-Ḥadīth*, trans. Nazmina Virjee, *Introduction to Ḥadīth including Dirāya al-Ḥadīth by al-Shahīd al-Thānī* (London: ICAS, 2002), 213-222. After discussing the issue as discussed by prominent Shī'ī scholars, the author concludes, "The contents of the four books are no different from the contents of other *Ḥadīth* books, in that it is just as essential that they be subject to the standards of evaluation of the reporter and the narration."
- ⁹ In actual fact it is the 29th verse and not 30th verse as quoted here.
- ¹⁰ *Behar al-Anwar, Ḥadīth*, No. 21: 14; al-Kāfi, vol. 8: 224.
- ¹¹ Meaning of the single saved sect (*ma'nā al-firqa al-wāḥida al-nājiyya*), Shaykh Sadūq, *Ma'ānī al-Akhhbār* (Intisharat Islami, Jameah Mudarressin Hauzeh Ilmiyeh, Qum, 1379 A.H.), 323.
- ¹² Shaykh Sadūq, *Kitāb al-Khisāl*, 584.

- ¹³ Shaykh Sadūq, *Kitāb al-Khisāl*, 585.
- ¹⁴ To know more about al-Majlisi, see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., s.v. “Madjlisi,” by ‘Abd al-Hādī Ḥā’irī.
- ¹⁵ To know more about the *Behar*, see *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, “Behar al-Anwar,” by E. Kohlberg.
- ¹⁶ Shaykh al-Mufid, *‘Amalī*, 132; *Behar al-Anwar*, vol. 28, chapter “The divisions of the umma after the Prophet (s.a.w.a)”, 11.
- ¹⁷ See Modarressi, *An Introduction*, 40-44, where Modarressi regards Shaykh al-Mufid in the rationalist trend in contra to the prevalent traditionist attitude of scholars at that period who were led by scholars from Qumm. Of note is Mufid’s teacher, Shaykh Sadūq was head of the Qummiyyūn or traditionists.
- ¹⁸ It seems that Mufid was inclined towards Mu’tazilī kalām ideas, see Wilferd Madelung, “Imamite and Mu’tazilī Kalām.”
- ¹⁹ See Modarressi, *An Introduction*, 40.
- ²⁰ See Modarressi, *An Introduction*, 41.
- ²¹ *Behar al-Anwar*, 12.
- ²² For the discussion on the term *ghulat* or *ghuluww* see Hossein Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi’ite Islam: Abū Ja’far ibn Qiba al-Rāzī and His contribution to Imāmīte Shi’ite Thought* (Princeton, New Jersey: The Darwin Press, Inc., 1993), 20.
- ²³ See *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., s.v. “Sulaym b. Kays,” by Moktar Djebli.
- ²⁴ It is said to suffer from *tadlīs* and *takhlīt* of authentic and false reports. See Sayyid Musāwī al-Khu’ī, *Mu’jam Rijāl al-Ḥadīth*, 20 vols. (Qum: Intisharat Hawzah Ilmiyyah, 198?), vol. 8, 216-228.
- ²⁵ *Behar al-Anwar*, vol. 28, *Ḥadīth* no. 20, 13; *Kitāb Sulaym*, “Introduction,” 25.
- ²⁶ Al-‘Allāma al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *Al-Mizān fī Tafīr al-Qur’ān*, 20 vols., trans. Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi, *Al-Mizān An Exegesis of the Qur’ān*, 10 vols. (Iran: WOFIS, 1982-2001). Tafīr of ayat 102, Ālu ‘Imrān, vol. 6, 295. Hereafter cited as *Al-Mizān*.
- ²⁷ Al-Sayyid Ja’far Subḥānī, *Buḥūth fī al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 7 vols. (Qum: Lajnah Idarat al-Hawzah al-Ilmiyyah, 1993), trans. Hasan Musawa, *al-Milal wan-Niḥal: Studi Tematis Mazhab Kalam*, vol. 1 (Indonesia: Penerbit al-Hadi, 1997). Hereafter cited as *Buḥūth*.
- ²⁸ Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *Al-Mizān*, 288.
- ²⁹ Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *Al-Mizān*, 289.
- ³⁰ Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *Al-Mizān*, 295.
- ³¹ Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *Al-Mizān*, 296.
- ³² Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *Al-Mizān*, 297-298.
- ³³ Ṭabāṭabā’ī, *Al-Mizān*, 298.
- ³⁴ Subḥānī, *Buḥūth*, 6.
- ³⁵ In his *al-Faṣl fīl Aḥwā’ wa al-Milal*, vol. 1, 248.
- ³⁶ *Al-Ṭabīr fī al-Dīn*, “Introduction,” 9.
- ³⁷ Subḥānī, *Buḥūth*, 11-13.
- ³⁸ See Subḥānī, *Buḥūth*, 15 for the list of Sunnī scholars who have quoted this

ḥadīth in their works of *Ḥadīth*.

³⁹ Subḥānī, *Buḥūth*, 15.

⁴⁰ Subḥānī, *Buḥūth*, 15.

⁴¹ At the time of writing of this article, I was informed by Prof. Hamid Algar (Berkeley, University California) of a study in Persian regarding this *ḥadīth* and its variant. See Ali Agha Nuri, “*Ḥadīth Ifṭirāq Ummat: Naqliha va Payamadiha (On the tradition ‘of the division of the community’: Its transmission and its reception)*”, in an unidentified Persian academic journal. I am not sure whether this is available online or not. I have not included the findings of that article here as my article was written before that article was published. Perhaps a more deeper article can be written after this, inshā’ Allah.