

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الحمد لله والصلاة والسلام على رسول الله وعلى آله وصحبه أجمعين



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Al-Jarh wa-l-Ta'dil Lesson 3 Overview

Instructor: Shaikh Omer Khurshid

Further inquiries: Info@talweehacademy.com

www.talweehacademy.com

Introduction

This lesson focuses on defining **Ta‘dīl** linguistically and technically, clarifying its relationship to **Jarḥ**, and explaining the foundational concepts of **‘Adālah** (uprightness) and **Ḍabṭ** (precision). It also addresses complex and often misunderstood issues surrounding *bid‘ah*, scholarly disagreement, and the limits of criticizing narrators.

The Purpose of al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta‘dīl

The central objective of al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta‘dīl is the **evaluation of narrations**, not the personal appraisal of narrators as an end in itself. The narrator (*rāwī*) is examined only insofar as his qualities affect the acceptance or rejection of his narration.

Thus, when scholars speak of *jarḥ* (criticism), they refer to describing a narrator in a manner that leads to:

- weakening (*taḍ‘īf*) of his narration, or
- softening (*talyeen*) it, or
- rejecting (*radd*) it entirely.

Conversely, *ta‘dīl* refers to describing a narrator in a way that necessitates **acceptance** of his narration.

Importantly, the reliability of a narration is not always tied absolutely to the individual narrator. A narration initially considered weak may later gain strength (*taqwiyah*) through corroboration (*mutāba‘āt* and *shawāhid*), thus becoming acceptable despite weaknesses in a particular transmitter.

Linguistic Meaning of Ta‘dīl

The term **Ta‘dīl** (تعديل) derives from the triliteral root **‘ayn–dāl–lām** (ع د ل). Classical lexicographers, most notably Ibn Fāris in *Maqāyīs al-Lughah*, explain

that this root conveys **two foundational meanings**, which are paradoxically opposites (*addād*):

- **al-istiwā'** (الاستواء): straightness, balance, uprightness
- **al-i'iwāj** (الاعوجاج): deviation or crookedness

Arabic contains several such roots whose meanings are determined by context. An example from the Qur'ān is the word **'as'asa** (عسعس) in the verse:

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا عَسْعَسَ

“By the night as it advances—or retreats.”

Here, *'as'asa* may mean either approaching or departing.

When the root **'adl** is used in the causative form (*tafa'ul*), it conveys the meaning of **straightening, aligning, or balancing something in relation to another**. Hence, linguistically, *ta'dil* implies affirming uprightness, balance, and sound alignment.

Technical Definition of Ta'dil

In technical usage (*iṣṭilāh*), **Ta'dil** is defined as:

وَصَفُ الرَّأْوِي فِي عَدَالَتِهِ وَضَبْطِهِ بِمَا يَفْتَضِي قَبُولَ رَوَايَتِهِ

“Describing a narrator in terms of his uprightness (*'adālah*) and precision (*ḍabṭ*) in a manner that necessitates acceptance of his narration.”

This definition makes clear that *ta'dil* is not limited to affirming moral integrity alone. Rather, it establishes **trustworthiness** (*tawthīq*), which requires **both**:

- moral uprightness (*'adālah*), and
- accuracy in transmission (*ḍabṭ*).

Thus, *ta'dīl* in the context of *al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta'dīl* is synonymous with *tawthīq*, not merely declaring someone morally upright.

Levels of Acceptance in Ḥadīth

Early scholars of ḥadīth divided narrations into two broad categories:

- **Maqbūl** (مقبول) – accepted
- **Mardūd** (مردود) – rejected

The category of *maqbūl* encompasses:

- **Ṣaḥīḥ li-dhātih**
- **Ṣaḥīḥ li-ghayrih**
- **Ḥasan li-dhātih**
- **Ḥasan li-ghayrih**

A narration may become *maqbūl* even if its narrator is initially weak, provided sufficient corroboration strengthens the report. This demonstrates once again that the ultimate concern is the **status of the narration**, not the absolute status of the narrator.

Understanding 'Adālah

The Nature of 'Adālah

'Adālah is described as a **malakah** (ملكة)—a deeply ingrained and stable character trait, not a temporary or occasional quality (*wasf*). It reflects a consistent disposition that governs a person's conduct.

This malakah results in continuous adherence to:

- **Taqwā** (تقوى)
- **Murū'ah** (مروءة)

Taqwā in the Context of Narrators

In the discipline of ḥadīth, *taqwā* does not refer to heightened spirituality or ascetic scrupulosity. Rather, following Ibn Ḥajar’s explanation in *Nuzhat al-Nazar*, it refers to:

- avoiding disbelief (*kufr*),
- avoiding open sinfulness (*fisq*), and
- avoiding religious innovation (*bid‘ah*).

However, defining *taqwā* through *bid‘ah* introduces significant methodological challenges, as the concept of *bid‘ah* itself is subject to scholarly disagreement.

The Problem of Bid‘ah and Objectivity

Not all disagreements in Islamic theology carry the same weight. Fundamental sects such as the Jahmiyyah, Mu‘tazilah, Khawārij, and extreme Shī‘ah differ from Ahl al-Sunnah on numerous foundational principles.

By contrast, disagreements among **Ash‘arīs**, **Māturīdīs**, and **Atharīs/Hanbalīs** are largely confined to specific theological issues, particularly in divine attributes (*ṣifāt*), while sharing broad agreement in core beliefs.

Historically, many leading scholars refrained from declaring mutual *tabdī‘* (accusations of innovation) among these groups. If every theological disagreement were treated as *bid‘ah* nullifying ‘adālah, the result would be the elimination of nearly all scholars from acceptability—a clearly untenable outcome.

Therefore, *bid‘ah* must be defined with **methodological restraint**, objectivity, and scholarly balance. Blanket accusations undermine the integrity of the tradition and open the door to attacking even the greatest imams of Islam.

Murū`ah and Its Limits

Meaning of Murū`ah

Murū`ah refers to dignified conduct and social propriety rooted in natural human modesty (*ḥayā`*). It prevents a person from actions that invite blame or degrade one's moral standing.

Cultural Considerations

While murū`ah is partially shaped by custom (*`urf*), it is **not entirely relative**. Any action or trait that Sharī`ah explicitly condemns—such as greed, stinginess, cruelty, or shamelessness—cannot be excused by social norms.

Thus, murū`ah operates within the boundaries of Sharī`ah-approved behavior. Cultural variation is only valid in matters that fall under permissible actions (*mubāḥāt*).

The Danger of Unrestrained Jarḥ

History shows that theological and juristic affiliations influenced some applications of *jarḥ wa ta`dīl*. For example, criticism of Imām Abū Ḥanīfah on the basis of *irjā`* is now widely recognized as flawed, since the *irjā` of the fuqahā`* was largely terminological, not doctrinal.

Opening unrestricted doors to criticizing scholars' *'adālah* risks:

- undermining scholarly authority,
- normalizing attacks on the learned, and
- eventually extending disrespect to the Companions themselves.

The consensus recognition of an individual's imamate by generations of scholars constitutes a powerful collective endorsement (*tazkiyah*) that cannot be overturned lightly.

Conclusion

Al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta‘dīl is a precision-based discipline rooted in balance, restraint, and methodological rigor. Its goal is safeguarding the Sunnah by evaluating narrations—not indulging in unchecked character assassination.

True *ta‘dīl* establishes **trustworthiness**, requiring both moral integrity and precision. Concepts such as *taqwā*, *murū’ah*, and *bid‘ah* must be applied with scholarly objectivity, awareness of disagreement, and respect for the hierarchy of errors.

When misapplied, al-Jarḥ wa al-Ta‘dīl becomes destructive; when applied correctly, it remains one of the greatest intellectual safeguards of Islamic knowledge.