Classical Scholars on Khilafah

إن الجماعة حبل الله ف اعتصموا
بوعروته الوثيقى لمن حانوا
في حديثنا رعبا منه وحنيننا
لولا الخليفة لم تأمن لنا سبل
وكان أضعفنا نصي الأقوانا

Indeed the jama'ah is the rope of Allah, so hold on to its grip, firm for him who professes Islam
How many a darkness does Allah repel by the sultan in our deen mercy results from him and in our dunya
If not for the khalifah, paths would not be safe for us and the weak would be a source of pillage for the strong

- Ibn al-Mubarak [d. 181 AH], Hilyat al-'Awliya, 8:164.

This is a compilation of comments by classical scholars on the issue of khilafah. By no means an exhaustive list, it is a selection of scholarly commentary which highlights the obligation and importance of the Khilafah. All quotes are fully referenced and the original Arabic text, along with a translation, is provided.

This compilation shows how the greatest minds of this ummah, the best of its scholars, saw the issue of khilafah as absolutely critical, referring to it as being, “from the necessities of the shari'a that simply cannot be left” (al-Ghazali), “from the greatest interests of the Muslims and greatest pillars of the deen” (al-Amidi), “a pillar from the pillars of the deen” (al-Qurtubi), “one of the greatest obligations of the deen” (Ibn Taymiyya), “the most important of obligations” (al-Haskafi), among other like statements.

Our scholars remind us in these quotes about how the sahaba gave this issue of khilafah such an importance that they delayed the burial of the best of creation, the Prophet (saw), due to being engaged with it. They also emphasise the great dangers of not having the khilafah, something we have seen, and continue to see, first-hand since its destruction in the early 20th century, since when the ummah has witnessed its darkest days.

We hope this compilation serves as a reminder to all Muslims about the most important nature of the obligation of khilafah and the need, in turn, to exert utmost effort and work for its re-establishment as a means to fulfill our due to Allah, the exalted, as shown to us by His Messenger (saw).
The word *imamah*[^1] denotes the succession (*khilafah*) of prophethood in the protection of the *deen* and the management of the worldly affairs, and its contracting to the one who fulfils it in the *ummah* is an obligation by consensus...”

(Imam al-Mawardi [d. 450 AH], *al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah*, p.56)

“They (scholars of *ahl al-sunnah*) said regarding the *khilafah* and *imamah* that the *Imamah* is an obligation obligated on the *ummah* to the end of establishing the *imam* who would appoint for them judges and ministers, secure their frontiers, mobilise their armies, divide the *fay‘*, and give justice to the oppressed from the oppressors; and they said that the way of contracting the *imamah* for the *ummah* is by their choice through exertion of effort.”

(Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi [d. 429 AH], *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, p.340)

“All of *ahl ul-sunnah* agreed, as did all the *murji‘a*, all the *shi‘a*, and all the *khawarij* upon the obligation of the *Imamah*, and that it is obligatory on the *ummah* to submit to a just *imam*, who establishes upon them the *ahkam* of Allah, and manages their affairs by the *ahkam* of the *shari‘a* with which the Messenger of Allah (saw) came; except only the *najdat* from the *khawarij* who said: the people are not obliged with the *imamah*, rather what is upon them is to mutually practice the what is correct between them.”


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[^1]: *Imamah* and *khilafah* are synonymous terms, both referring to the political leadership of all Muslims entrusted with the duty of implementing Islam. *Imam* and *khalifah* are also synonymous, referring to the person in whom this leadership is manifest, or in modern parlance, the head of state in the *khilafah*. 
The Imamah is a complete authority and general leadership over all the people in all important religious and temporal affairs. Its roles includes the defense of the territory of dar al-Islam, looking after the interests of the community, establishing the Islamic da’wah by providing evidence and proof and by the sword, restraining deviation and inequity, providing help and support to the oppressed against transgressors and recovering dues from those who refuse to fulfill them and providing them to those who were deprived of them...the companions of the Messenger of Allah (saw) saw that moving swiftly to appoint the imam was the right thing to do; thus they left the preparation of the Prophet’s burial because of being engaged in this task, fearing lest a tribulation encompass them.

(Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni [d. 478 AH], Ghiyath al-Umam fi Tiyath al-Dhulam, 1:22-23)
The Muslims must have an Imam, who carries out the implementation of their *ahkam*, the maintaining of their *hudud*, the guarding of their frontiers, the equipping of their armies, the receiving of their *zakat*, the subjugation of those who rebel, thieves and highway robbers, the establishment of *jumu’a* and the two ‘Eids, the settlement of disputes which take place amongst people, the receiving of evidence based on legal rights, the facilitation of the marriage of the young men and women who have no guardians, and the distribution of the booty.

(Imam al-Nasafi [d. 537 AH], *al-Aqida al-Nasafiyyah*, p. 354)

When the death of Abu Bakr (ra) neared he said (to the *sahaba*), "Consult amongst yourselves about this matter (of *khilafah*)." He then described the attributes of Umar (praising him) and chose him as successor. It did not occur to his heart, or that of anyone else, in the least, that it is permissible for there to be no *imam*. When the death of Umar (ra) neared he made the matter one of consultation between six, and they consented upon Uthman (ra), and after that upon Ali. All of this indicates that the *sahabah* (ra), the first and best of the Muslims, consented that having an *imam* was necessary...This type of consensus is a definitive evidence for the obligation of the *imamah*.

(Imam al-Shahrastani [d. 548 AH], *Nihayat al-Iqdam fi ‘Ilm al-Kalam*, 1:268)

Hence, appointing the Imam is from the most important interests of the Muslim and the greatest pillars of the *deen*. It is obligatory insofar as it is known by text that it is indicated upon as such by the revelation...

(Imam Sayf al-Din al-Amidi [d. 631 AH], *Ghayat al-Muram fi ‘Ilm al-Kalam*, p. 366)
"هذه الآية أصل في نصب إمام وخلية يسمع له ويطاع لتجتمع به الكلمة وتنفذ به أحكام الخليفة ولا خلاف في وجوب ذلك بين الأمة ولا بين الأئمة إلا ما روى عن الأصم حيث كان عن الشريعة اسم وكذلك كل من قال بقوله وتبعته على رأيه ومذهبه.

"وأجمع الصحابة على تقديم الصديق بعد اختلاف وقع بين المهاجرين والأنصار في سقيفة بني ساعدة في التعيين، حتى قال الأنصار: منا أمير ومنكم أمير، فدفعهم أبو بكر وعمر والمهاجرون عن ذلك، وقالوا لهم: إن العرب لا تدين إلا لهذا الحي من قريش، ورووا لهم الخبر في ذلك، فرجعوا وأطاعوا لقريش. فلو كان فرض الإمامة غير واجب لا في قريش ولا في غيرهم لما ساغت هذه المناظرة والمحاورة عليها، ولقال قائل: إنها ليست واجبة لا في قريش ولا في غيرهم، فما لنا أن ننزعحكم وجه ولا فائدة في أمر ليس بواجب ثم إن الصديق رضي الله عنه لما حضرته الوفاة عهد إلى عمر في الإمامة، ولم يقل له أحد هذا أمر غير واجب علينا ولا عليك، فدل على وجوبها وأنها ركن من أركان الدين الذي به قوام المسلمين، والحمد لله رب العالمين.

وأجمعوا على أنه يجب على المسلمين نصب خليفة ووجوهه بالشرع لا بالعقل...

"وإذا أخروا دفنه صلى الله عليه وسلم من يوم الاثنين إلى ليلة الأربعاء أواخر نهار الثلاثاء للاشتغال بأمر البيعة ليكون لهم إمام يرجعون إليه، وإن اختلفوا في شيء من أمر تجهيزه ودفنه وينقادون لأمره لئلا يؤدي إلى النزاع واختلف الكلمة وكان هذا أهم الأمور والله أعلم."
“They (the scholars) consented that it is an obligation upon the Muslims to appoint a khalifah, and that its obligation is by revelation, not reason”.

“And they (the sahaba) only delayed his (saw) burial from the day of Monday till the night of Wednesday, the end of the day of Tuesday, because of being occupied with the matter of the bay’ah so that there would be for them an imam to return to his decision if they differed in any matter of the funeral and burial, and so they would obey his command, so that dispute and disunity does not occur, and this was the most important of matters, and Allah knows best.”

(Imam an-Nawawi [d. 676 AH], Sharh Sahih Muslim, 12:205 & 7:36 respectively)

"It is imperative to know that the office in charge of governing the people is one of the greatest obligations of the deen. Nay, there is no establishment of the deen or the dunya except by it. The interests of humans are not achieved except by social interaction due to their need of one another, and this social interaction necessarily requires a head, such that the Prophet (saw) said, “If three go out in travel, let them make one of them the leader” (Abu Dawud)...so he (saw) obligated making one a leader in a small and temporary social interaction in travel, drawing attention by this to all other types of social interaction.

Further, (appointing a leader is obligatory) because Allah has obligated enjoining the good and forbidding the evil, and this is not executed except through a power and authority. The same applies to other obligations such as jihad, establishing justice, organising the hajj, jumu’a and the eids, assisting the oppressed, implementing the hudud; none of these are able to be executed except by a power and authority. For this reason, it has been narrated that, “The sultan is the shade of Allah on Earth”, and it is said, “Sixty years of an oppressive imam is better than one night without any leader,” and experience substantiates this. Thus did the salaf – such as al-Fadl ibn ‘Iyad and Ahmad ibn Hanbal – used to say, “If we had on du’a guaranteed to be answered, we would supplicate for the sultan.”

(Ibn Taymiyyah [d. 728 AH], al-Siyasah al-Shar’iyyah, p.129)
Our position on appointing the Imam is that it is obligatory by text...the consensus of the Muslims of the first generation after the passing of the Prophet (saw) to avoid being in a state of not having an Imam has reached us by concurrent narration (tawatur). This was emphatic to the extent that Abu Bakr (ra) said in his sermon, “Behold, Muhammad (saw) has passed away, and it is necessary for this deen to have someone to lead and implement it,” so the companions all moved swiftly to accept him and leave for him to decide about the most important matter, namely, the burial of the Messenger of Allah (saw). The Muslims have remained on this position in every age up till this time of ours, in appointing an Imam who is followed.”


There is (scholarly) consensus on the appointment of an Imam being obligatory. The difference of opinion is only on the question of whether the obligation is on Allah or man, and whether is it by textual or rational evidence.² The correct position is that it is obligatory upon man by the text, due to his saying (saw), 'Whosoever dies not knowing the Imam of his time dies the death of jahiliyyah', and because the Ummah (the companions) made the appointing of the Imam the most concerning of important matters after the death of the Prophet (saw) to the extent that they gave it priority over the burial; similarly after the death of every Imam, and also because many of the other shari‘a obligations depend upon it.”

(Imam al-Taftazani [d. 792 AH], Sharh al-Aqa‘id al-Nasafiyyah, p.353-354)

² To understand what is being referred to here one must note that whilst all the scholars - barring literally a handful whose opinion carries no weight – held the appointment of a khilafah to be an obligation, there was disagreement as to the nature of this obligation: is it established on the basis of revelation or reason, and is the obligation on Allah or man? The majority held that the obligation was on man and on the basis of the revelation. This is the correct position. Others held that the obligation was on the basis of the mind and was on Allah, or that it was on the basis of the mind but on man.
"Indeed the appointment of the Imam is an obligation, whose obligatory nature is known in the revelation by the consensus of the sahaba and the tabi’een, because the companions of the Messenger (saw) rushed to the bay’ah of Abu Bakr (ra) and to submit the management of their affairs to him upon his (saw) death. Similarly in each age after that; the people were never left in anarchy in any era, and this persisted to be the case by a consensus indicative of the obligation of appointing an imam."

(Bin Khaldun [d. 808 AH], al-Muqaddimah, Chapter III, Section 26, 2nd para.)

"Know that the sahabah, Allah be pleased with them, consented that selecting the Imam after the end of the era of prophethood was an obligation. Indeed they made it the most important of obligations as they were busy with it (giving it priority) over the burial of the Messenger of Allah (saw)."

(Imam Ibn Hajar al-Haytami [d. 974 AH], al-Sawaa’iq al-Muhriqah, 1:25)

"It is obligatory on the people to appoint an imam who looks after their interests – such as implementing the ahkam, executing the hudud, defending the frontiers, preparing the armies, collecting the zakat to distribute it, subjugating rebels, thieves and brigands, resolving disputes that arise amongst people, dividing the booty and the like – due to the consensus of the companions after the death of the Prophet (saw) on appointing him, to the extent that they considered it the most important of obligations and prioritised it over his (saw) burial, and the Muslims have remained on this (appointing an imam) in every age."

(Imam Shams al-Din al-Ramli (d. 1004 AH), Ghayat al-Bayan fi Sharah Zabd ibn Raslan, 1:15)
Appointing the greater imam (the khilafah) upon the Muslims is an obligation of sufficiency.

(Mansur ibn Yunus al-Buhuti [d. 1051 AH], Kashshaf al-Qinaa’ ‘an Matn al-Iqnaa’, 6:158)

The major imamah (khilafah) is the right of general disposal over the people. Its study is in scholastic theology and establishing it is the most important of obligations [it is of the most important obligations because the fulfillment of so many other shari'a obligations depends on it]. For this reason did they (the sahaba) give it priority over the burial of the Prophet (saw) [He (saw) passed away on Monday and was buried on the day of Tuesday or the night of Wednesday or its day (according to the different narrations), and this sunnah remains till this day such that the khilafah is not buried until another is appointed].


Know that it is obligatory for there to be in the jama'a of the Muslims a khilafah for interests that simply cannot be fulfilled except with his presence...

(Shah Waliullah al-Dehlawi [d. 1152 AH], Hujjat Allahi al-Baligha, 2:229)
they were busy with it (giving it priority) over the funeral preparations of the Prophet (saw)...From the strongest evidences for the obligation of appointing an imam and pledging allegiance to him is what Ahmad, al-Tirmidhi, ibn Khuzayma and ibn Hibban in his sahih extracted of the hadith of al-Harith al-Ash'ari in the wording (that the Prophet (saw) said), "Whosoever dies whilst not having over him an imam of the jama'ah, then indeed his death is the death of jahilliya." Al-Hakim also narrated it from Ibn 'Umar and Mu'awiya and al-Bazzar narrated it from Ibn Abbas."

(Imam al-Shawkani (d. 1250 AH), al-Sayl al-Jarrar al-Mutadaffiq 'ala Hada'iq al-Azhar, 1:936)

"اتفق الأئمة رحمهم الله تعالى على: أن الإمامة فرض وأنه لا بد للمسلمين من إمام يقيم شعائر الدين وينصف المظلومين من الظلمين وعلى أنه لا يجوز أن يكون على المسلمين في وقت واحد في جميع الدنيا إمامان لا متفقان ولا مفترقان وعلى أن الأئمة من قريش وأنه يجوز للإمام أن يستخلف.

"The Imams (of the four madhabs: Abu Hanifa, Malik, Shaf'i, Ahmad) - may Allah have mercy on them – all consented that the Imamah is an obligation, and that the Muslims must appoint an imam who would implement the rites of the deen, and give the oppressed justice against the oppressors, and they agreed that it is not permitted that there be over the Muslims, at any one time, two imams, in agreement or discord, and that the imams are from Quraysh and that is permitted for the imam to choose a successor."

(Imam al-Juzayri [d. 1360 AH], al-Fiqh 'ala al-Mathahib al-Arba'a, 5:416.)

والحمد لله رب العالمين والصلاة والسلام على رسول الله
References