Introduction

- The book gathers creed statements from Imam Abu Haneefah, Imam Maalik, Imam ash-Shaafi'ee and Imam Ahmad رحمهم الله.
- Main subjects: Tawheed, Allah's Names and Attributes, Qadar, Iman, the Companions رضي الله عنهم and warning against Kalaam.
- The four Imams agreed on the main foundations of Sunni creed.
- The important difference discussed in the book is the reported position of Abu Haneefah concerning Iman.

Section One – How to Understand Correct Creed

Revelation Before Human Reason

- The Qur'an and authentic Sunnah are the foundation of creed.
- The mind is used to understand revelation. It does not create a new religion.
- If something is unclear, return it to people of knowledge instead of arguing without knowledge.
- Ibn Mas'ood رضي الله عنه taught: follow and do not invent new religious matters.

Warning Against Kalaam

- Kalaam means speculative theological argument that makes human reasoning and invented terms the foundation of creed.
- The early Imams warned against leaving the clear Qur'an and Sunnah for endless theological arguments.
- Teaching, asking useful questions and explaining evidence are not the problem. The warning is against speculation that replaces revelation.

Follow the Salaf

- Salaf means the early Muslims, especially the Companions and the generations after them who followed them correctly.
- Qur'an 9:100 praises the earliest Muhajirun, Ansar and those who follow them with excellence.
- Al-Awzaa'ee taught Muslims to hold firmly to the reports of the Salaf.
- Stop where the early Muslims stopped in matters of creed and do not invent new beliefs.

Avoid Unclear Invented Terms

- Use the clear language of the Qur'an and Sunnah.
- Later words can have different meanings. Ask what is meant before accepting or rejecting them.
- The book discusses terms such as body, direction and limit as examples of words that require explanation.

Section Two – One Creed in the Main Foundations

- All four Imams affirmed Allah's Names and Attributes.
- All four affirmed that the Qur'an is Allah's Speech and is not created.
- All four affirmed that believers will see Allah in the Hereafter.
- All four rejected theological methods that opposed revelation.
- The book identifies the discussion of Iman as the important reported difference.

Imam Abu Haneefah – d. 150 AH

Tawheed and Allah's Attributes

- Worship and Du'a are for Allah.
- Allah is described with the Names and Attributes found in revelation.
- Allah's Attributes are real and are not like the attributes of creation.
- The reports affirm Allah's Face, Hand, Self, Anger and Pleasure without asking how.
- Allah has always possessed His perfect Attributes.
- Allah's knowledge, power, hearing, sight and speech are perfect.
- Allah rose over the Throne in the way that befits Him.
- Allah spoke directly to Musa عليه السلام. Qur'an 4:164.
- The Qur'an is Allah's Speech and is not created.
- Human voices, writing and ink are created but Allah's Speech is not created.

Qadar

- Allah knew everything before it happened.
- Everything is written in the Preserved Tablet.
- Nothing happens outside Allah's knowledge, will and decree.
- People truly act and are responsible for their choices.
- Avoid the two extremes: people do not act independently of Allah and people are not free from responsibility.

Iman

- The reported position defines Iman as affirmation by the tongue and confirmation in the heart.
- The reported position does not make actions part of the definition of Iman.
- The book presents this as the important difference from Maalik, ash-Shaafi'ee and Ahmad.
- The book also discusses reports that Abu Haneefah may have later moved away from the earlier position.

Companions and Kalaam

- Speak about the Companions رضي الله عنهم with goodness.
- Order of the Rightly Guided Caliphs: Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman then Ali رضي الله عنهم.
- Abu Haneefah warned against making Kalaam the method for understanding religion.
- Follow narrations and the way of the Salaf.

Imam Maalik ibn Anas – d. 179 AH

Tawheed and Allah's Attributes

- Maalik affirmed the Attributes found in revelation without asking how.
- His famous explanation of Istiwa: its meaning is known, its exact manner is unknown to us, belief in it is required and asking about its exact manner is an innovation.
- Allah is above His creation and His knowledge covers everything.
- Believers will see Allah in the Hereafter.
- Qur'an 75:22–23 and 83:15 are used in the discussion of seeing Allah.

Qadar

- Maalik rejected the belief that human actions happen independently of Allah's decree.
- Allah's will and decree cover what happens.
- The source includes strong historical rulings about people who openly promoted Qadari beliefs. Study them as historical scholarly reports.

Iman

- Iman is words and actions.
- Iman increases and decreases.
- Qur'an 2:143 calls the Muslims' earlier Salah their Iman, showing that actions can be part of Iman.

Companions and Kalaam

- Maalik strongly rejected insulting the Companions رضي الله عنهم.
- Qur'an 59:10 teaches believers to ask forgiveness for those who came before them and keep hatred out of their hearts.
- He warned against speculative Kalaam.
- Religion should not change every time a more skilled debater appears.

Imam ash–Shaafi'ee – d. 204 AH

Tawheed and Allah's Attributes

- An oath should be by Allah or His Names, not created things.
- Allah's Names are not created.
- Allah rose over the Throne and the authentic reports about Divine Descent are accepted without asking how.
- Nothing is like Allah. Qur'an 42:11.
- Believers will see Allah in the Hereafter.
- The Qur'an is Allah's Speech and is not created. Qur'an 9:6.
- Allah spoke directly to Musa عليه السلام. Qur'an 4:164.

Qadar

- What Allah wills happens and what He does not will does not happen.
- People really act but their actions do not escape Allah's knowledge, will and decree.
- Ash-Shaafi'ee rejected the Qadari belief.

Iman

- Iman is words and actions.
- Iman increases through obedience and decreases through sin.
- Qur'an 9:124 says revelation increases believers in faith.
- Qur'an 18:13 says Allah increased the believing youth in guidance.

Companions and Kalaam

- The Companions have a special place and should be respected.
- Order of excellence: Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman then Ali رضي الله عنهم.
- Ash-Shaafi'ee strongly warned against Kalaam.
- The Qur'an, Sunnah and knowledge of Hadith must remain the foundation.

Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal – d. 241 AH

Tawheed and Allah's Attributes

- Tawakkul means the heart depends on Allah rather than what people possess.
- Allah has always been a Speaker.
- The Qur'an is Allah's Speech and is not created.
- Allah is described only with what revelation teaches.
- Authentic Hadith about Allah's Attributes are accepted without asking how.
- Believers will see Allah in the Hereafter.
- Allah is above His Throne in the manner that befits Him.
- Ahmad rejected denying Allah's Attributes.

Qadar

- Allah knew and decreed everything.
- People really act and are responsible.
- Nothing happens outside Allah's decree.
- Ahmad strongly rejected denial of Qadar.

Iman

- Iman is words and actions.
- Iman increases and decreases.
- Salah, Zakah and other acts of obedience are connected to Iman.
- Qur'an 8:2-4 describes believers whose faith increases and then mentions Salah and spending.

Companions and Kalaam

- Mention the Companions رضي الله عنهم with goodness.
- Rightly Guided Caliphs: Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman then Ali رضي الله عنهم.
- Ahmad affirmed the virtue and Caliphate of Ali رضي الله عنه.
- He strongly warned against Kalaam and returned students to Qur'an, Sunnah and early narrations.

Quick Comparison of the Four Imams

- Allah's Attributes: all four affirm the revealed Attributes without comparing Allah to creation.
- Qur'an: all four affirm it is Allah's Speech and is not created.
- Seeing Allah: all four affirm believers will see Allah in the Hereafter.
- Qadar: all four affirm Allah's knowledge, will and decree.
- Companions: all four respect and defend the Companions رضي الله عنهم.
- Kalaam: all four warn against making speculative theology the foundation of religion.
- Iman: Maalik, ash-Shaafi'ee and Ahmad say Iman includes words and actions and increases and decreases. The book reports a different definition from Abu Haneefah.

Short Biographies

Abu Haneefah – 80–150 AH

- Leading scholar of Iraq and one of the four famous Imams of Fiqh.
- Known for intelligence, knowledge and work as a merchant.
- His school became known as the Hanafi Madhhab.

Maalik ibn Anas – 93–179 AH

- Great Imam of Madinah.
- Author of al-Muwatta.
- Known for Hadith, Fiqh and strong respect for the Sunnah.

Muhammad ibn Idris ash-Shaafi'ee – 150–204 AH

- Known for Qur'an, Hadith, Arabic, Fiqh and strong memory.
- Studied with Imam Maalik and other major scholars.
- Important scholar in explaining the principles of Islamic law.

Ahmad ibn Hanbal – 164–241 AH

- Major Imam of Hadith and Fiqh.
- Travelled widely to collect Hadith.
- Known for patience, worship and firmness during the trial concerning whether the Qur'an was created.

Appendix – Iman

- Sunni position presented in the appendix: Iman includes belief of the heart, words of the tongue and actions of the body.
- Iman increases through obedience and becomes weaker through sin.
- Qur'an 2:143 shows an action, Salah, being called Iman.
- Qur'an 8:2-4, 9:124 and 18:13 show increase in faith or guidance.
- Islam and Iman can overlap in meaning. When mentioned together, Islam can especially refer to outward submission and Iman to inward faith.
- Some early scholars said, 'I am a believer, if Allah wills,' out of humility and to avoid claiming perfect Iman.

Appendix – Criticism of Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari

- This section is the author's criticism of al-Kawthari and should be kept separate from the creed statements of the four Imams.
- The author discusses al-Kawthari's approach to the creed of the Salaf.
- He discusses al-Kawthari's statements about earlier Sunni scholars, including Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn al-Qayyim.
- He discusses Ja'd ibn Dirham and Jahm ibn Safwan.
- The author argues that some quotations were changed or presented incorrectly.
- The appendix compares beliefs attributed to al-Kawthari with the creed of Abu Haneefah presented earlier.

Appendix – The Path Is One

- Allah's revealed religion is one straight path.
- Qur'an 6:153 commands Muslims to follow Allah's straight path and not other paths.
- Qur'an 3:103 commands Muslims to hold firmly to Allah's rope and not divide.
- Qur'an 30:31-32 warns against division into sects.
- The Prophet ﷺ instructed Muslims to hold to his Sunnah and the Sunnah of the Rightly Guided Caliphs.
- The early Muslims repeatedly taught: follow and do not innovate.
- True unity must be based on revelation.

Conclusion

- The later Muslims are corrected by the same basic guidance that corrected the first Muslims.
- Return to the Qur'an, authentic Sunnah and correct understanding of the religion.
- Correct knowledge must lead to correct action.
- Qur'an 5:3 teaches that Allah completed the religion.
- Qur'an 13:11 teaches that Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves.
- Scholars must teach clearly and separate correct guidance from harmful ideas.
- The book ends by connecting correct knowledge with correct Islamic education and action.

Evidence to Memorize

- Qur'an 9:100 – following the earliest Muslims with excellence.
- Qur'an 42:11 – nothing is like Allah. He is All-Hearing, All-Seeing.
- Qur'an 4:164 – Allah spoke directly to Musa عليه السلام.
- Qur'an 9:6 – the Qur'an is called the Speech of Allah.
- Qur'an 75:22-23 and 83:15 – evidence used for seeing Allah in the Hereafter.
- Qur'an 2:143 – Salah is called Iman.
- Qur'an 8:2-4, 9:124 and 18:13 – Iman increases.
- Qur'an 59:10 – make Du'a for earlier believers and keep hatred from the heart.
- Qur'an 6:153 – follow the straight path.
- Qur'an 3:103 – hold firmly together to Allah's rope.
- Qur'an 5:3 – Allah completed the religion.
- Qur'an 13:11 – people must change what is within themselves.

Key Words

Aqeedah: Islamic beliefs.

Tawheed: worshipping Allah alone and singling Him out in what belongs only to Him.

Qadar: Allah's knowledge, writing, will and creation of what happens.

Iman: faith.

Salaf: the early Muslims who followed the Prophet ﷺ.

Kalaam: speculative theological argument.

Sifat: Allah's Attributes.

Istiwa: Allah's rising over the Throne in the way that befits Him.

Bilaa Kayf: without asking exactly how.

Tashbeeh: comparing Allah to creation.

Ta'teel: denying what revelation affirms about Allah.

Ru'yah: seeing Allah in the Hereafter.

Bid'ah: a religious innovation without proof from revelation.

Sahabah: the Companions رضي الله عنهم.

Final Review

- Source of creed: Qur'an and authentic Sunnah understood through the way of the early Muslims.
- Allah's Attributes: affirm them without resemblance and without asking how.
- Qur'an: Allah's Speech, not created.
- Qadar: Allah knows, wills and decrees. People still act and are responsible.
- Iman: words and actions, increases and decreases according to the position presented from Maalik, ash-Shaafi'ee and Ahmad.
- Important difference: the reported definition of Iman from Abu Haneefah.
- Companions: respect them and speak about them with goodness.
- Kalaam: do not replace revelation with speculative theology.
- Method: follow revelation and the way of the Salaf.