

scandalizing my host and his guests, I made it clear that I didn't necessarily agree with either opinion. I merely wished to prove the importance of reading and research before spreading information about which one is uncertain. Then I turned to Abu Baraa and said, "If you haven't even read this simple book, written at the request of your organization's founder, how can you assume the responsibility of lecturing us on religion?" I then addressed our host and told him if he wanted to share lessons on religion with us, he should invite a religious man who at least knows what he's talking about. This, of course, turned out to be my last visit to that diwaniya. But this story also illustrates one of the causes of our current afflictions. There are those who usurp the responsibility of teaching and leading others in religion without respect for the fact that they are not qualified to do so. Even some who are qualified can be found to abuse religion, promoting partisan and political ideologies in its name, guiding our young men and women to whatever serves only their own interests. If this is not the case, how else can we explain the extremism and abhorrent terrorism that we have begun to witness these days? Those young men who blow themselves up among Muslim worshipers with the hopes of entering paradise as martyrs, have certainly been guided by a self-proclaimed "religious leader" who encourage them to murder their fellow Muslims with the promises of "beautiful women in heaven." Paradise does not require indulging the disordered will of men preaching politicized religion. I wish to address the youth: God has granted you the blessing of reason, so use it! Do not act like a flock of mindless sheep herded to your own slaughter.