

# Beyond Doubt and Without Contradiction: Toward a Coherent Understanding of the Qur'an

## Abstract

**Abstract:** The Qur'an declares itself to be a scripture "about which there is no doubt" <sup>1</sup> and a discourse free from internal inconsistencies <sup>2</sup>. This article explores the philosophical and theological implications of these claims, arguing that a truly coherent understanding of the Qur'an requires letting go of contradictory interpretations inherited from past scholars, regardless of their eminence. First, we examine Qur'anic verses that proclaim its perfection, unity, and lack of contradiction. We then discuss classical and modern scholarly insights which assert that any *apparent* contradictions in the Qur'an are due to human misunderstanding rather than flaws in the text. Finally, we contend that students of the Qur'an must be willing to critically evaluate and even discard scholarly opinions that conflict with the Qur'an's clear meaning or with each other. Only by prioritizing the Qur'an's own harmony and engaging in deep reflection can one fulfill the charge to reconcile its message into a consistent whole. An epilogue offers concluding reflections on approaching the Qur'an as a **"coherent, homogeneous and integrated work"** <sup>3</sup>, cautioning against clinging to contradictory views that obscure its guidance.

## Introduction

In Islamic thought, the Qur'an is not just one scripture among many; it is believed to be the *verbatim* word of God, bestowed as the final revelation to humanity. As such, the Qur'an makes bold self-referential claims about its own nature. It opens by asserting its absolute reliability: **"This is the Book about which there is no doubt, a guidance for those conscious of Allah"** <sup>1</sup>. Elsewhere, the text challenges skeptics to find any disharmony within it: **"Do they not then reflect on the Qur'an? Had it been from anyone other than Allah, they would have certainly found in it many inconsistencies"** <sup>2</sup>. These verses (Q.2:2 and Q.4:82, respectively) set the stage for a fundamental principle in Qur'anic studies – namely, that the divine message is internally consistent and free of error or contradiction by virtue of its divine authorship.

From a **philosophical** standpoint, the Qur'an's invitation to search for contradictions is striking. It effectively provides a falsification test grounded in the law of non-contradiction: truth, if truly from an All-Knowing source, must be self-consistent <sup>4</sup>. Any genuine contradiction would indicate human origin or error. As one modern scholar noted, *"the verse in effect teaches a rational criterion for truth in scripture – non-contradiction"*, resonating with the classical logical axiom that truth cannot be self-contradictory <sup>4</sup>. The Qur'an's confidence in this criterion – daring critics to find inconsistencies – underscores the Muslim belief in its divine perfection.

On a **theological** level, these attributes of certainty and coherence carry important implications for how Muslims approach interpretation. If the Qur'an is indeed without doubt or internal conflict, then **any** apparent contradiction one encounters must be resolved rather than accepted at face value. Over centuries, Islamic scholars (the *ulema*) developed tools like tafsīr (exegesis), principles of interpretation, and doctrines such as *naskh* (gradual legal abrogation) to explain and harmonize verses that seem to differ <sup>5</sup> <sup>6</sup>. Yet,

scholars are human – their understandings can diverge, and interpretative traditions sometimes preserve conflicting opinions on the Qur'an's meanings. This raises a crucial question: **What should a sincere student of the Qur'an do when faced not with a Qur'anic contradiction, but with contradictions among scholars' interpretations of the Qur'an?**

This article argues that pursuing a coherent understanding of the Qur'an requires the courage and discernment to set aside contradictory scholarly views, no matter how venerable the source, and return to the scripture's clear guidance. In the following sections, we will: (1) review Qur'anic affirmations of its own consistency and clarity, (2) discuss how early Muslim authorities stressed the importance of holistic reflection to resolve apparent tensions, and (3) outline why blind adherence to inherited interpretations can impede one's ability to see the Qur'an's unified message. Throughout, we will anchor the discussion in Qur'anic verses and authoritative statements, emphasizing that **"God's word is truth, not to be doubted,"** whereas **"people's words (or understandings) are what differ."** <sup>7</sup>

## The Qur'an: A Book Beyond Doubt and Free of Contradiction

The Quranic text characterizes itself with superlative clarity and consistency. In addition to the foundational verse in *Surah Al-Baqarah* (2:2) that there is *"no doubt"* in this Book <sup>1</sup>, numerous other passages reinforce the notion that the revelation is perfectly reliable and unerring. For instance, *Surah Al-Kahf* opens by praising God *"who has sent down to His servant the Book and has not placed in it any crookedness"* <sup>8</sup>. In the next verse, the Qur'an is described as *"upright"* or *straight (qayyim)* <sup>9</sup>, indicating that it is perfectly just and correct – having no deviations that would lead one astray. Likewise, *Surah Az-Zumar* (39:28) calls the Qur'an *"an Arabic Qur'an, without any deviance (crookedness), so that they might become righteous"* <sup>10</sup>. The consistent theme is that God's word contains no distortions or errors; it is a **"straight path"** guiding to truth.

Such statements about the Qur'an's flawless nature segue into the explicit challenge articulated in *Surah An-Nisa* (4:82) quoted above. Classical commentators explain that this verse is telling doubters: if the Qur'an were a human product (or a composite of multiple authors), over the 23 years of its revelation one would expect discrepancies, contradictions in doctrine or legal rulings, revisions of ideas, and other signs of human limitation <sup>11</sup> <sup>12</sup>. Instead, the scripture presents a remarkably consistent worldview and a cohesive moral and theological system, despite being revealed piecemeal in response to varied circumstances. The coherence of its meanings and the harmony of its laws convinced early Muslims of its divine origin. As the 9th-century exegete *Imam al-Ṭabarī* explains, *"if they examine the Book of Allah they would realize that what you (O Muhammad) have brought them is from their Lord because of the coherence of its meanings and the harmony of its rulings, with each part of the Qur'an confirming and supporting the truth of the other parts"* <sup>13</sup>. He goes on to say that if it were from other than God, *"its rulings would have differed and its meanings contradicted, and some of it would point out the corruption of other parts"*, but **"no such disharmony exists"**, so the only conclusion is that it is entirely from Allah <sup>14</sup>.

This understanding was not lost on the earliest Muslim scholars. Al-Ṭabarī, in the same discussion, cites the traditionist Qatādah (d. 736 CE) who succinctly remarked: **"Allah's speech does not contradict itself; it is truth in which there is no falsehood. But people's speech does contradict itself."** <sup>15</sup>. Another early commentator, Ibn Zayd, echoed that the Qur'an *"does not negate some parts with others, nor cancel out itself"*, asserting that any perceived discrepancy is only due to *"the deficiency of people's understanding"* <sup>16</sup>. These statements encapsulate a core tenet: **the Qur'an's internal unity is absolute, whereas human expressions and interpretations are prone to inconsistency.**

Indeed, the Qur'an repeatedly calls on readers to reflect deeply on its verses precisely to appreciate this unity. The rhetorical question **"Do they not then contemplate the Qur'an?"** appears multiple times (e.g. Q. 4:82, Q.47:24), urging that true understanding comes from sustained reflection (*tadabbur*). *Surah Muḥammad* (47:24) pointedly asks: **"Then do they not reflect upon the Qur'an, or are there locks upon their hearts?"** <sup>17</sup>, suggesting that failure to perceive the Qur'an's coherence is a kind of spiritual malady – a locked heart. In *Surah Ṣād* (38:29), God describes the revelation as a *"blessed Book which We have sent down to you, [O Prophet], so that they may contemplate its verses, and so that those of understanding may be reminded."* <sup>18</sup>. The emphasis is on *contemplation*: one must ponder the verses in relation to one another, not in isolation. Modern scholars observe that the Qur'an *"is permeated through and through with a uniform outlook and attitude"*, which becomes evident when one reads it holistically <sup>3</sup>. In fact, the Qur'an characterizes itself as *"the best statement: a consistent Book wherein is reiteration"* <sup>19</sup> – its messages repeat and resemble each other, creating a reinforcing pattern rather than contradictions. The *unity of truth* in the Qur'an is such that its parts explain and bolster one another, a feature described in *Surah Az-Zumar* (39:23) where *"Allah has sent down the best discourse, a Book [with parts] resembling each other, consistent (mutashābihan)..."* <sup>19</sup>.

To be *"beyond doubt"* is thus not only a theological virtue of the Qur'an but also a directive for readers: the more one trusts in the Qur'an's coherence and dives deeper into its study, the more any initial doubts or confusions fade away. *"You will find it free of all contradiction"*, as one commentary summarizes, and *"therefore, there is absolutely no question or any doubt about the authority and authenticity of this Glorious Scripture."* <sup>20</sup>. This does not mean readers will never find verses that puzzle them or seem in tension; however, it means such dilemmas have resolutions if approached correctly. The Qur'an promises guidance for the reverent mind, not confusion. As the verse cited above from *Surah Al-Baqarah* implies, *"no doubt"* remains *if* the reader is among those humble enough to be *"mindful of God"* and receive its guidance <sup>21</sup>. The task, then, is to reconcile verses and meanings into a coherent whole, trusting that any real contradiction is *impossible* given the source.

## **"The Qur'an Was Not Revealed to Contradict Itself": Classical Insights**

Acknowledging the Qur'an's intrinsic coherence leads to a methodological principle in Qur'anic scholarship: **interpret the Qur'an by the Qur'an itself, and do not pit one verse against another**. The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) famously cautioned his companions about this. In a hadith narrated in Ibn Kathīr's commentary, a group of early Muslims were debating the interpretation of a verse and their voices grew loud in disagreement. Hearing this, the Prophet became upset and said: **"Indeed, the nations before you were destroyed by their disagreements over their prophets and by setting parts of their scriptures against others. The Qur'an was not revealed to belie (contradict) itself, but rather to confirm itself. So whatever you understand of it, act upon it, and whatever is unclear to you, refer it to those who have knowledge."** <sup>22</sup>. This profound narration encapsulates several important points:

- All revealed scripture is meant to be a *coherent message* from God; previous communities erred when they created internal discord by making scripture verses clash with each other (*perhaps by misinterpretation or selective emphasis*). Such behavior led to their spiritual ruin.
- By contrast, **the Qur'an "was not revealed to contradict itself, but to confirm itself."** In other words, every verse complements and reinforces the rest of the Book. There is a unity of purpose and truth underlying the diverse topics of the Qur'an.

- The Prophet's instruction on how to handle the Qur'an's meanings is twofold: **act upon what is clear** (*practice the unequivocal teachings*) and **seek knowledge about what is unclear** rather than arguing contentiously. If a verse is ambiguous or difficult (*mutashābih*), one should consult those more learned, or at least refrain from drawing rash conclusions that could pit it against other verses. This approach is a direct application of the Qur'anic verse, "[They] say, 'We believe in it; all of it is from our Lord,' and none will take heed except people of reason" (Q.3:7) <sup>23</sup>. That is, a believer accepts the entirety of the revelation as true and interrelated.

Early exegetes took this advice to heart. We have already seen Qatādah's and Ibn Zayd's remarks emphasizing that any *perceived* contradictions in the Qur'an are due to human folly, not the text. They urged believers to **"not strike some passages against others"** <sup>23</sup>, trusting that God does not issue a statement in one place only to conflict with another elsewhere <sup>23</sup>. Apparent contradictions could be reconciled *"by knowledge"*, meaning through deeper study, understanding of context, and awareness of concepts like abrogation or particularization. Believers were thus *"to approach the text with humility and study, rather than haste in judgment"* <sup>24</sup>.

Exegetes like *Imam* Ibn Kathīr (14th c.) echoed these themes. He writes under 4:82 that **"Allah states that there are no inconsistencies, contradictions, conflicting statements or discrepancies in the Qur'an, because it is a revelation from the Most-Wise, Worthy of all praise."** <sup>25</sup>. If it were otherwise – if it were *"fraudulent and made up"* – then people would have found *"contradictions in abundance"*, Ibn Kathīr notes, but they have not <sup>26</sup>. For Ibn Kathīr, the impeccable consistency of the Qur'an is positive proof that **"the Qur'an is the truth coming from the Truth – Allah."** <sup>27</sup>. He too cites the verse *"Do they not then think deeply in the Qur'an, or are their hearts locked up?"* (Q.47:24) to stress that one must reflect and not be blinded by negligence <sup>28</sup>.

Furthermore, Ibn Kathīr preserves the same prophetic hadith mentioned above, concluding from it: **"The Qur'an does not contradict itself; it only confirms and clarifies itself."** <sup>29</sup>. Any internal tensions are *only apparent*, and with proper knowledge all verses are seen to be in agreement <sup>29</sup>. Acting on the clear verses and seeking clarity on the ambiguous is the way to avoid falling into disharmony or sectarian dispute. This interpretive ethos can be summarized in a set of guiding principles that classical scholars upheld:

- **Holistic Reading:** Interpret verses in light of other verses, not in isolation. The Qur'an is its own best commentary, since *"a Scripture consistent (with itself), wherein reiteration occurs"* explains itself by repetition and context <sup>30</sup>. As al-Ṭabarī showed, theological and legal rulings form a unified whole, so one part cannot be understood in a manner that nullifies another <sup>14</sup>.
- **No "Cherry-Picking":** One must accept *"all of it is from our Lord"* <sup>23</sup>. It is theologically unacceptable to believe in some passages of the Book and disbelieve or neglect others (cf. Q.2:85). This extends to not overemphasizing one set of verses at the expense of others. Any interpretation of a given verse that blatantly contradicts another verse is ipso facto flawed.
- **Gradualism & Context:** Some verses were revealed in specific contexts or with evolving directives (e.g., the phased prohibition of alcohol). What might superficially appear as a contradiction (e.g., an earlier leniency versus a later strictness) is resolved by the concept of *naskh*, or divinely mandated succession of rulings <sup>5</sup> <sup>31</sup>. Classical scholars developed the science of abrogation to determine which verse's ruling is final in such cases <sup>32</sup>. Crucially, they did not see abrogation as the Qur'an *contradicting itself*; rather, it is **"part of the divine plan in legislation"**, with no two conflicting rulings applicable at the same time <sup>31</sup>. Thus the *wisdom and consistency* of the Qur'an remain intact <sup>33</sup>.

- **Suspension of Judgment:** If an apparent contradiction cannot be resolved by the individual reader due to lack of knowledge, the advice is to refrain from hastily declaring the Qur'an at fault. As the hadith says, refer difficult matters *"to those who have knowledge"* <sup>22</sup>. In classical times, this meant consulting learned scholars; today it might include reviewing reputable tafsīr literature or academic research. The underlying humility is vital – one assumes *one's own understanding* might be incomplete rather than assuming the Qur'an has erred (an assumption the Qur'an's doctrine of inerrancy disallows from a believer).

By applying these principles, generations of scholars maintained the conviction that the Qur'an's **"seamless unity and truth"** will manifest to anyone who *ponders* sincerely <sup>34</sup>. They saw Qur'an 4:82 as both an *invitation* and a *challenge*: an invitation to engage one's intellect and discover the scripture's unity, and a standing challenge to produce or find any real inconsistency <sup>34</sup>. Notably, as historical testimony to the challenge, no internal inconsistency in the Qur'an has ever been conclusively demonstrated despite centuries of scrutiny <sup>35</sup>. Many alleged contradictions brought by polemicists turn out to stem from misunderstandings – differences in context, terminology, or perspective that can be reconciled on closer examination <sup>36</sup>. This enduring coherence further bolsters the faithful's trust in the text's divine origin.

In summary, the classical scholarly attitude was to **resolve** and **reconcile** – never to simply accept a contradiction. As one early scholar, *Imam* Qatādah, wisely said: **"God's word is truth, not to be doubted,"** and human interpretations are what diverge <sup>7</sup>. This sets the stage for the next issue: what happens when *human interpretations* themselves diverge or contradict one another? The Qur'an is infallible in Muslims' eyes, but scholars are not. How should a seeker of truth navigate the ocean of tafsīr and opinion to maintain a coherent understanding?

## Letting Go of Contradictory Scholarship in Light of Qur'anic Coherence

While the Qur'an is consistent, interpretations of it have not always been so. Across fourteen centuries, Muslim scholars – be they jurists, theologians, mystics, or modern academics – have offered a vast array of insights on the Qur'an. Inevitably, differences of opinion (*ikhtilāf*) arose on various verses and issues. In many cases these represent the richness and flexibility of the tradition, but in some cases they present the student of the Qur'an with a confusing dilemma: respected authorities have espoused *contradictory* conclusions. For one pursuing a *"coherent understanding of the Qur'an,"* this scenario tests one's commitment to the Qur'anic text over human authority. **If two interpretations conflict, both cannot be correct in the same sense** – one (or both) must involve some error or inadequacy. How should one proceed, especially when those interpretations come from towering figures of Islamic scholarship?

Islamic intellectual tradition itself provides guidance on this matter. The great scholars of the past did not consider themselves or their peers beyond error. On the contrary, they consistently humbled themselves before the Qur'an and Sunnah and cautioned others not to follow their opinions blindly. The four eponymous Imams of Sunni law – Abū Ḥanīfa, Mālik, al-Shāfiʿī, and Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal – all have famous statements to this effect. Imam Mālik (d. 795) is reported to have said: **"Truly I am only a mortal. I make mistakes and I am correct. So look into my opinions; whatever agrees with the Book and the Sunnah, accept it, and whatever does not agree with them, ignore it."** <sup>37</sup>. Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767) similarly stated: **"When I say something contradicting the Book of Allah or what is narrated from the Messenger (ﷺ), then ignore my saying."** <sup>38</sup>. In another narration he warned his students: *"we are mortals: we say one thing one day and take it back the next day"* <sup>39</sup> – highlighting that a scholar's view is not immutable truth. Al-Shāfiʿī

(d. 820) said that if an authentic teaching from the Prophet is found “*contrary to my view, then the correct view is what the Messenger of Allah has said, and that is my view.*” <sup>40</sup> . Imam Aḥmad (d. 855) advised: “**Do not follow my opinion; neither follow the opinion of Mālik, nor Shāfiʿī, nor Awzāʿī, nor Thawrī, but take from where they took [i.e. the Qurʾān and Hadith].**” <sup>41</sup> . He further remarked: “*The opinion of Awzāʿī, the opinion of Mālik, the opinion of Abū Ḥanīfa – all of it is opinion, and it is all equal in my eyes. However, the proof (dalīl) is in the narrations [from the Prophet and Companions].*” <sup>42</sup> .

Such quotations could be multiplied, but the message is clear and consistent: **No scholar, regardless of stature, is above the revealed evidence.** The Qurʾān and the Prophet’s *Sunna* (authentic teachings) are the ultimate authorities, and every scholar’s understanding must be evaluated against these touchstones. If a scholar’s interpretation “*goes against the Word of Allah, or the Sunnah of His Prophet, then it carries no weight, regardless of how learned the scholar might be.*” <sup>43</sup> . This principle was *enjoined* by the scholars precisely to prevent the community from splintering into camps following individuals rather than following the truth. It also serves to correct the course if an esteemed person erred in some matter – their eminence should not sanctify a mistake for future generations.

Now, applying this ethos to our context: when pursuing a coherent understanding of the Qurʾān, one may need to “**let go of the contradictions of previous scholars**” – meaning, one may have to set aside certain interpretations found in the classical or modern corpus that cannot be reconciled with stronger evidence or with the Qurʾān’s overarching message. This is not an exercise in modern arrogance or disrespect; rather, it is rooted in the sincere desire to *follow what is true* in the sight of God. As the Qurʾān states, “**Follow what has been revealed to you from your Lord and do not follow other masters beside Him**” (Q.7:3), and it cautions against blindly following ancestral or popular traditions at the expense of truth (see Q.2:170) <sup>44</sup> .

<sup>45</sup> .

There are practical scenarios where this principle becomes important:

- **Reconciling Tafsīr Disagreements:** Classical tafsīr works sometimes offer different explanations for the same verse. For example, consider a hypothetical scenario where two respected commentators interpret a verse about, say, a social law in seemingly incompatible ways. A student aiming for coherence must examine the proofs and reasoning each provides, and see which interpretation aligns better with the Qurʾān’s language, context, and with other verses on the topic. It could be that one scholar relied on a weak narration or had a contextual assumption that no longer holds; the other perhaps had a more Qurʾān-centric reading. One should not simply accept both interpretations as equally valid *if* they genuinely contradict each other – instead, prefer the one more consonant with the Qurʾān’s own tenor, or see if a higher-level reconciliation is possible (sometimes differing views can be harmonized by nuance). The key is not to allow an unresolved contradiction to stand *in one’s own understanding* of the Qurʾān.
- **Qurʾān vs. Extra-Qurʾānic Sources:** A significant area of tension has historically been between certain *hadith* reports and the apparent sense of Qurʾānic verses. Some scholars in the past, in efforts to uphold what they believed to be authentic *hadith*, resorted to strained interpretations of Qurʾānic verses that would otherwise contradict those *hadith* <sup>46</sup> . This led to *manipulating the meaning* of clear Quranic statements to fit external material <sup>46</sup> . A coherentist approach would instead privilege the clear Qurʾānic text — since the Qurʾān is absolutely established in Islamic belief — and critically examine the authenticity or interpretation of the extraneous report. Many Muslim scholars have indeed taken this route, arguing that the Prophet’s true *Sunna* could never contradict

the Qur'an; thus any irreconcilable conflict implies a misunderstanding or a spurious narration <sup>47</sup>  
<sup>48</sup> . As an example, if one found a hadith suggesting something contrary to Qur'an's *letter or spirit*, giants like Ibn Taymiyyah and others have taught that such hadith must be interpreted in a compatible way or else deemed unreliable. The general point is: **no source or scholar can override the Qur'an's integrity**. The Qur'an is the criterion (*furqān*) and the "*rope of Allah*" holding the community together; everything else in the Islamic tradition derives its legitimacy from consistency with the Qur'an.

- **Theological and Juridical Conflicts:** Islamic intellectual history saw the emergence of schools of theology (Ash'arī, Māturīdī, Mu'tazilī, etc.) and law (Hanafī, Shafī'i, Maliki, Hanbali, etc.). While all based their arguments on the Qur'an and Prophetic teachings, they sometimes reached divergent conclusions on matters of creed or law. A student of Qur'an should not be dismayed by this diversity; however, if these differences lead to completely contradictory views of God's message, one has to use the Qur'an (and sound reason) as the scale to weigh them. For instance, one theological school might interpret Qur'anic verses on human free will in a way that heavily emphasizes predestination, while another emphasizes accountability – leading to opposite practical attitudes. A careful, contextual study of the Qur'an's *own words* on the subject might reveal that the truth lies in a nuanced middle, or in a synthesis that earlier polemics obscured. The seeker may then have to depart from the rigid dogmas of either school to embrace the more integrative understanding of the Qur'an. Such a move is not an insult to those scholars' piety or intellect; it is an outcome of the natural progression of knowledge and the individual's accountability to pursue truth.

It should be stressed that "*letting go*" of scholars' contradictions does **not** mean discarding all past scholarship or arrogantly assuming one can interpret the Qur'an with complete independence (*tabula rasa*). The Islamic scholarly tradition is immensely valuable, and oftentimes what seem like contradictions are actually differences in emphasis or context that can coexist. Scholars often disagreed yet each captured an aspect of truth; a beginner may mistakenly perceive a contradiction where a seasoned scholar sees complementarity. Thus, part of the process is also to gain *enough knowledge* to discern whether two interpretations truly contradict or merely address different angles. If two views can be legitimately reconciled (e.g., by scope, context, level of application), then doing so preserves richness without sacrificing coherence. However, when two views genuinely conflict in content and cannot both be true in the same respect, coherence demands choosing the view with the stronger evidence from Qur'an and authentic Sunnah.

To navigate this path, the student of Qur'an should adopt certain practices and mindsets, distilled from the discussion so far:

- **Anchor to the Qur'an's Clear Verses:** Always return to the unequivocal, foundational verses (*ayat muḥkamāt*) as the backbone of your understanding. Use them as the measure to evaluate interpretations of more ambiguous verses <sup>49</sup> <sup>50</sup> . This aligns with the Qur'an's own guidance in 3:7 about clear and allegorical verses.
- **Prioritize Context and Consistency:** Before accepting an interpretation, check it against the broader context of the surah and the Qur'an as a whole. Does it make the Qur'an's message more coherent or does it create new tensions elsewhere? Favor interpretations that produce a harmonious reading across different passages.
- **Beware of Partisanship:** Do not become partisan to any scholar or school to the point that you defend their view at all costs. Such partisanship (*taqlīd* in the negative sense) can blind one to

evidence. As shown, the great Imams themselves forbade this kind of attachment to their opinions <sup>38</sup> <sup>37</sup> . Maintain a stance of respectful consideration, not infallible allegiance, toward scholars.

- **Consult Multiple Sources:** When faced with a difficult verse or conflicting interpretations, consult several credible tafsīrs and scholarly works. This gives a range of perspectives and often the truth emerges in the comparative process. One may find that *most* authorities lean one way, with good reason rooted in Quranic evidence, whereas a solitary or less founded opinion leans another – in such cases the choice is easier. In other cases, a minority view might actually have strong proof that later became overlooked; a careful study can uncover this. The point is to engage with the scholarly tradition actively, not passively.
- **Use Reason but Stay Humble:** Coherent understanding is aided by sound reasoning – after all, the Qur’an invites reasoning and calls its message logical and wise. If an interpretation leads to a logical contradiction or an absurd outcome, that’s a red flag. However, humility is key; one’s personal reasoning should not be absolutized against clear scriptural statements. The aim is to refine one’s reason *with* revelation, not in opposition to it. The Qur’an commends those who hear different views and follow the best of them (Q.39:18). Discerning “the best” requires both reason and faith.
- **Embrace Clarification over Conflict:** When encountering a tension, prefer the route of clarification (through study, asking knowledgeable persons, etc.) over jumping into controversy. Often, calm analysis dissolves what emotional argumentation makes appear sharp. As the Prophet advised, unnecessary quarreling over the Book can be destructive <sup>51</sup> . The goal is *illumination*, not point-scoring.

To summarize this approach, we can list a few **key principles for coherent Qur’anic understanding** in light of the above discussion:

- **1. Trust in Divine Consistency:** Begin with the conviction that the Qur’an is wholly true and consistent, as it claims <sup>25</sup> <sup>19</sup> . Any genuine contradiction is impossible; apparent ones are puzzles to solve, not truths to accept.
- **2. Interpret Scripture with Scripture:** Let clearer verses guide the interpretation of obscure ones; never isolate a verse from the rest of the Qur’an in a way that breeds contradiction <sup>51</sup> <sup>23</sup> . The Qur’an confirms itself – our interpretations should do the same.
- **3. Do Not Cherry-Pick or Dichotomize:** Accept *all* Qur’anic statements as true and seek an understanding in which they all hold true in their proper context <sup>23</sup> . Reject any exegesis that effectively nullifies one part of the Qur’an to uphold another.
- **4. Seek Knowledge Humbly:** If confused, research patiently or consult knowledgeable scholars. Acting on incomplete knowledge can entrench contradictions; humility and patience allow resolution <sup>51</sup> .
- **5. Prioritize Qur’anic Meanings over Human Opinions:** However revered an opinion, if it clearly conflicts with the Qur’an’s teachings or with stronger evidence, be ready to leave it <sup>43</sup> . Scholars are guides, not infallible authorities.
- **6. Reconcile or Choose the Stronger Evidence:** When scholarly views conflict, attempt to reconcile them if possible by context or scope. If not possible, weigh which view has firmer grounding in the Qur’an and Prophetic teaching, and adopt that – even if it means differing from a school or teacher.
- **7. Avoid Blind Conformity (Taqlīd):** Faithfully following the Qur’an sometimes means diverging from popular interpretations. As early Muslims warned, do not simply say “we found our fathers (or imams) following this” if shown evidence to the contrary (cf. Q.2:170) <sup>44</sup> . Use the intellect and guidance God gave you.
- **8. Remember the Purpose – Guidance:** The aim is not merely to solve logical puzzles, but to be *guided*. Any interpretation that upholds the Qur’an’s consistent guidance toward faith,



righteousness, and justice is preferable to one that breeds doubt or confusion. God revealed the Qur'an "as guidance and mercy" (e.g. Q.10:57); a coherent understanding will enhance those qualities for the reader.

By adhering to such principles, a student or scholar can navigate the ocean of exegesis and opinions without losing sight of the **"straight path"** that the Qur'an charts. In doing so, one also honors the legacy of past scholars in the best way: not by treating their every word as unimpeachable, but by striving as they did to let God's word speak most clearly, even if it means correcting course when contradictions appear. As one contemporary writer put it, *the Qur'an presents itself as "a coherent, homogeneous and integrated work"*, and it is the task of each generation to appreciate that coherence ever more deeply <sup>3</sup>. This may involve shedding accretions of interpretation that, however well-intentioned, obscured the balance or unity of the Qur'anic message.

## Epilogue

Approaching the Qur'an as a **perfectly coherent discourse** is both an intellectual and spiritual journey. It demands critical thought, for one must evaluate differing viewpoints and resolve apparent conflicts – but it also demands sincerity and reverence, for one must submit one's own preferences to the higher wisdom of revelation. In an age when a student of the Qur'an has access to centuries of scholarship at their fingertips, the task can seem daunting: how to sift truth from error amid so many voices? The guidance offered by the Qur'an and the Prophetic tradition, however, is timeless in this regard. We are reminded to hold fast to the **"rope of Allah"** (Q.3:103) – a symbol of the Qur'an's unifying truth – and not be divided. We are warned not to be like those who fractured their religion into sects (Q.30:32). In essence, unity in understanding will only emerge if we all prioritize the one incontrovertible source of unity: the Word of God.

Throughout this article, we have emphasized letting go of *human* contradictions in order to uncover the divine consistency of the Qur'an. This is not to discount human scholarship, but to put it in its proper place: subservient to the scripture. If previous scholars interpreted something in mutually exclusive ways, we do not honor them by blindly taking sides or enshrining discord; we honor them by reexamining the issue afresh with the tools they gave us – the Qur'an, the Sunnah, reason, and methodology – to arrive at a truth that may reconcile or transcend their views. In doing so, we continue the legacy of *tajdīd* (renewal) and *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) that has kept Islamic thought vibrant. Crucially, we do so *"regardless of their stature"* – for no human is beyond making mistakes, and even giants of knowledge would not want us to perpetuate any mistakes they made. They would prefer we correct them, just as they often corrected their own teachers or contemporaries.

The Quranic principle can be encapsulated in the verse: **"And moreover, this is My path, which is straight, so follow it; and do not follow other paths, for they will separate you from His way"** <sup>52</sup>. The *straight path* (*ṣirāṭ mustaqīm*) here can be understood as the singular truth of God's guidance, while the "other paths" are those divergences and sectarian loyalties that lead people away from that unified truth. Scholar's opinions, schools of thought, cultural traditions – these can either serve the straight path or divert from it. When they conflict and become *separate paths*, a choice must be made. The believer is to choose God's path over any competing allegiance. In context, God says *"This has He instructed you so that you may become righteous"* <sup>52</sup> – righteousness (taqwā) is facilitated by focusing on His guidance alone.

Ultimately, attaining a coherent understanding of the Qur'an is not a one-time accomplishment but a continual process. As one reflects more, learns more, and even makes mistakes and corrects them, the

coherence becomes ever clearer. **“The onus is on the reader to study and understand, and when they do, the Qur’an’s perfection of design becomes apparent,”** noted one analysis <sup>53</sup>. The experience of many sincere readers is that initially confusing passages resolve over time, difficult concepts find their place, and what once looked like disparate pieces of a puzzle come together to reveal a magnificent picture. This is part of the *miracle* of the Qur’an – that a single book addressing so many topics can maintain a consistent message and continue to enlighten readers across ages and contexts.

In closing, let us recall that the Qur’an’s first description in Chapter 2 is **“guidance for the God-conscious”**, without doubt or error <sup>1</sup>. Guidance (*hudā*) in Arabic is related to showing the way in darkness. When previous interpretations cast shadows or confusion, the Qur’an itself is the light that must lead us out. No matter how venerable a scholar or how entrenched an interpretation, if it contradicts the Qur’an’s light, it must be left behind. This is a path that requires courage – the courage to question inherited ideas – but it is walked with the comfort that one’s hand is placed in God’s hand through His revelation. As the Qur’an reassures the Prophet, and by extension all believers: **“And say, ‘Truth has come, and falsehood has departed. Indeed, falsehood is ever bound to depart.’”** (Q.17:81). Striving for a contradiction-free, doubt-free understanding of the Qur’an is essentially a quest for that truth that vanquishes falsehood. It is a quest that every student of the Qur’an is invited to undertake, with the promise that, by Allah’s grace, the journey will only increase one’s faith and certainty in the glorious coherence of His Book – a Book that is, truly, **“beyond doubt”** and **“without contradiction.”**

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<sup>1</sup> Surat Al-Baqarah [2:2-3] - The Noble Qur'an - القرآن الكريم

<https://legacy.quran.com/2/2-3>

<sup>2</sup> Surah An-Nisa - 82 - Quran.com

<https://quran.com/en/an-nisa/82>

<sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> <sup>5</sup> <sup>6</sup> <sup>7</sup> <sup>11</sup> <sup>12</sup> <sup>13</sup> <sup>14</sup> <sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup> <sup>22</sup> <sup>23</sup> <sup>24</sup> <sup>25</sup> <sup>26</sup> <sup>27</sup> <sup>28</sup> <sup>29</sup> <sup>31</sup> <sup>32</sup> <sup>33</sup> <sup>34</sup> <sup>35</sup> <sup>36</sup> <sup>51</sup> <sup>53</sup> A Seminal Verse: The Glorious Quran Free of Scientific, Philosophical, Historical or Theological Contradictions – The Glorious Quran and Science

<https://thequran.love/2025/03/09/a-seminal-verse-the-glorious-quran-free-of-scientific-philosophical-historical-or-theological-contradiction/>

<sup>8</sup> Surah Al-Kahf - 1-13 - Quran.com

<https://quran.com/18/1-13>

<sup>9</sup> Surah Al-Kahf - 1-5 - Quran.com

<https://quran.com/18/1-5>

<sup>10</sup> Surat Az-Zumar [39:22-28] - The Noble Qur'an - القرآن الكريم

<https://legacy.quran.com/39/22-28>

<sup>17</sup> Surat Muhammad [47:24] - The Noble Qur'an - القرآن الكريم

<https://legacy.quran.com/47/24>

<sup>18</sup> Surah Sad - 29 - Quran.com

<https://quran.com/en/sad/29>

<sup>19</sup> <sup>30</sup> The Quranic Arabic Corpus - Translation

<https://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=39&verse=23>

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<https://islamawakened.com/quran/2/2/default.htm>

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52 Surah Al-An'am - 153 - Quran.com

<https://quran.com/en/al-anam/153>