

## RESPECT FOR KNOWLEDGE AND SCHOLARS IN THE QUR'AN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF IBN KATSIR'S TAFSIR AND AL-MISBAH'S TAFSIR AS A FOUNDATION FOR EDUCATION (Q.S. AL-MUJADALAH: 11)

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### Abstract

This study examines the concept of honoring knowledge ('ilm) and scholars ('ulama) in the Qur'an through a comparative analysis of the classical exegesis of Ibn Kathīr and the contemporary interpretation of M. Quraish Shihab's Tafsir Al-Mishbah on Qur'an Surah al-Mujādalah verse 11. The background of this research arises from the shifting perception of religious authority in modern society, characterized by rapid information flows, the rise of instant religious figures, and the weakening of traditional Islamic scholarship. The objectives of this research are: (1) to explain the Qur'anic concept of knowledge and scholars; (2) to compare the interpretative frameworks of Ibn Kathīr and Quraish Shihab; and (3) to identify educational values derived from both exegetical approaches. This qualitative study employs library research, using Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr and Tafsir Al-Mishbah as primary sources. Data were analyzed through content analysis and comparative methods to examine methodological differences, interpretative emphases, and educational implications. The findings show that Ibn Kathīr prioritizes authentic narrations (riwāyāt) in interpreting the verse and highlights social ethics and the Prophet's exemplary conduct. Meanwhile, Quraish Shihab adopts a maqāsid-oriented approach, emphasizing universal moral principles and contextual relevance to modern social and educational settings. The study reveals that knowledge in Islam integrates rational, spiritual, and moral dimensions. Scholars are regarded as the inheritors of prophets, entrusted with intellectual and ethical responsibilities. In conclusion, both tafsir traditions complement each other: Ibn Kathīr provides strong textual-historical foundations, while Al-Mishbah offers contextual insights essential for constructing relevant and holistic Islamic educational frameworks.

**Keywords:** Knowledge, Scholars, Ibn Kathir's Exegesis, Tafsir Al-Mishbah, Qur'an 58:11, Islamic Education, Qur'anic Interpretation.

### Abstrak

*Penelitian ini membahas konsep penghargaan terhadap ilmu dan ulama dalam Al-Qur'an melalui kajian komparatif atas tafsir klasik Ibnu Katsir dan tafsir kontemporer Al-Mishbah karya M. Quraish Shihab terhadap Q.S. Al-Mujādalah ayat 11. Latar belakang penelitian ini bertumpu pada fenomena menurunnya otoritas ulama dan bergesernya pemaknaan terhadap ilmu di tengah masyarakat modern yang ditandai oleh deras arus informasi, munculnya figur keagamaan instan, serta melemahnya tradisi keilmuan Islam. Penelitian ini bertujuan: (1) menjelaskan konsep ilmu dan ulama*

menurut *Al-Qur'an*; (2) membandingkan penafsiran Ibnu Katsir dan Quraish Shihab terhadap ayat tersebut; dan (3) mengidentifikasi nilai-nilai pendidikan Islam yang dapat diperoleh dari kedua corak tafsir tersebut. Penelitian menggunakan metode kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan dengan sumber utama kitab *Tafsir Ibn Katsir* dan *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*. Analisis dilakukan melalui *content analysis* dan pendekatan komparatif untuk mengidentifikasi persamaan dan perbedaan metode, orientasi, serta pesan pendidikan dalam kedua tafsir. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Ibnu Katsir menekankan otoritas riwayat sahih sebagai dasar pemaknaan ayat serta menyoroti aspek etika sosial dan keteladanan Nabi. Sebaliknya, Quraish Shihab menampilkan pendekatan *maqāsidī* dengan penekanan pada pesan moral universal dan relevansi ayat dalam konteks kehidupan modern. Temuan penelitian menegaskan bahwa ilmu dalam Islam tidak hanya bersifat rasional, tetapi juga moral dan spiritual. Ulama dipandang sebagai pewaris nabi yang mengemban tanggung jawab sosial dan keilmuan. Kesimpulannya, kedua tafsir saling melengkapi: Ibnu Katsir menyediakan fondasi tekstual-historis, sementara Al-Mishbah memperkuat pemahaman kontekstual sebagai dasar pendidikan Islam yang relevan sepanjang masa.

**Kata Kunci:** Ilmu, Ulama, Tafsir Ibn Katsir, Tafsir Al-Mishbah, Q.S. Al-Mujadalah: 11, Pendidikan Islam, Penafsiran Al-Qur'an.

## INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an, as the primary source of Islamic teachings, places great emphasis on knowledge and those who possess it. Knowledge is portrayed as a light that guides humanity toward the truth, while scholars are regarded as central figures who preserve, develop, and impart that knowledge to society (Amrudin, 2025). In various verses, the Qur'an affirms that those with knowledge hold a special status in the sight of Allah, as emphasized in Surah Al-Mujādalah, verse 11. This verse not only illustrates Allah's esteem for those with knowledge but also underscores the spiritual, social, and moral elevation bestowed upon those who apply their knowledge. Thus, studies on the status of knowledge and scholars are an important part of understanding the value structure of education in Islam.

Contemporary developments reveal a shift in society's perspective toward knowledge and scholars. On one hand, technological advancements and the flow of information provide broad access to knowledge. On the other hand, there is a growing tendency toward a shift in religious authority within society, particularly with the emergence of instant religious figures who lack adequate scholarly credentials (Subhan et al., 2021). This has led to a narrowing of the concept of ulama and a weakening of respect for Islamic scholarly traditions. These conditions highlight the urgency of returning to the Qur'anic concepts regarding knowledge and scholars, particularly in verses that directly emphasize their status, such as Surah Al-Mujādalah, verse 11.

Previous research indicates that studies on the appreciation of knowledge and scholars have been discussed from various perspectives, such as Islamic education, socio-religious studies, or exegesis studies, albeit in a fragmented manner. However, research specifically comparing classical exegesis (Ibn Kathir) and contemporary exegesis (Tafsir Al-Mishbah) regarding Surah Al-Mujādalah verse 11 as a *foundation for education*

remains relatively limited. Most previous studies have only emphasized the excellence of knowledge or the status of scholars without linking it to pedagogical relevance and the context of modern education. Thus, this study offers a novel comparative approach to two distinct styles of exegesis to explore a more holistic and contextual understanding of education.

Ibn Kathir's exegesis, as a representation of *tafsir bil-ma'tsūr*, emphasizes authentic narrations, hadiths, and the opinions of the early scholars (*salaf*). Meanwhile, the *Al-Mishbah Exegesis* by M. Quraish Shihab is known for its contextual approach, communicative language, and the relevance of its interpretation of verses to modern society (Sholeh 2017). These methodological differences and distinct intellectual approaches make both works highly compelling for study, particularly in understanding the concept of respect for knowledge and scholars within the context of Islamic education. Through a comparison of these two commentaries, this study aims to illustrate the dynamics of exegesis that are not merely textual but also contextual to the needs of the times (Siregar et al., 2021).

The main research question addressed in this study is how the concept of respect for knowledge and scholars is understood in the Qur'an through Surah Al-Mujādalah, verse 11, and how the interpretive differences between Ibn Kathir and Quraish Shihab contribute to formulating a comprehensive foundation for Islamic education. Furthermore, this study seeks to identify how the role of scholars as intellectual and moral figures can be strengthened within the context of modern education, which faces challenges such as digitalization, disinformation, and the erosion of moral authority within society. Overall, the objectives of this study are to: (1) describe the concepts of knowledge and scholars in the Qur'an; (2) analyze and compare the interpretations of *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* and *Tafsir Al-Mishbah* regarding Quranic Surah Al-Mujadalah, verse 11; (3) identify the educational values contained in that verse based on both commentaries; and (4) formulate the contribution of the concept of respect for knowledge and ulama as a foundation for the development of Islamic education. Thus, this study is expected to enrich the body of exegetical scholarship and make a tangible contribution to strengthening the Islamic scholarly tradition in the modern era.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative research method using a literature review approach. This approach was chosen because the study focuses on textual analysis, specifically verses from the Qur'an and the interpretations of exegetes, without utilizing field data. The primary data sources for this study are *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* as a representation of classical exegesis and *Tafsir Al-Mishbah* by M. Quraish Shihab as a representation of modern exegesis. Secondary sources include other exegetical works, scholarly journals, and literature related to Islamic studies and scholars. Data collection was conducted through documentation, namely reading, examining, and categorizing information from various sources. Data analysis was carried out in two stages: content analysis to identify the

meaning of the verse and the exegetes' interpretations, and comparative analysis to compare the methods and emphases of Ibn Kathir's and Quraish Shihab's exegeses. This approach was used to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of Quranic Surah Al-Mujadalah, verse 11, particularly regarding respect for knowledge and scholars.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### The Concept of Valuing Knowledge in the Qur'an

The term *ilmu* (العلم) is derived from the three root letters “*ayn*,” “*lām*,” and “*mīm*.” The root of this word conveys the meaning of knowing or having an understanding of something (Abū Ḥusayn, 1971). In Arabic, the word *ilmu* encompasses several primary meanings such as recognizing, knowing, indicating, and understanding. Its masdar form, *ilman*, is the antonym of *al-jahl*, which means ignorance. Thus, knowledge is understood as a person's state when they know something correctly (Louis Ma'lūf, 1977). Al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī explains that knowledge is the understanding of the essence of a thing. According to him, the object of knowledge consists of two forms: first, knowledge regarding the substance or essence of something; second, the determination of a thing based on the presence or absence of another related thing. This definition indicates that knowledge is not merely information, but understanding based on true and verifiable knowledge. This is stated in *Mufradāt Alfāz al-Qur'ān*: (al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī, 1992)

العلم: إدراك الشيء بحقيقته وذلك ضربان، أحدهما: إدراك ذات الشيء والثاني:  
الحكم على الشيء بوجود شيء هو موجود له، أو نفي شيء هو منفي عنه

Meaning: “Knowledge is knowing the essence of something, which, in terms of its object, consists of two aspects: first, knowing the substance of something; second, determining something based on the presence or absence of something else.”

In Islamic terminology, knowledge (*ilm*) is defined as knowledge acquired through revelation, reason, experience, and human intuition, systematically organized and directed toward discovering ultimate truth. Knowledge also functions as a spiritual path to understanding Allah SWT as well as a rational tool within the Islamic epistemological system. Because knowledge in Islam integrates revelation and reason into a unified body of knowledge, its ontological foundation differs from that of modern Western science.

M. Quraish Shihab explains that *ilm* is the result of human efforts to understand the signs of Allah, both the cosmic signs found in the universe and the verbal signs enshrined in the Qur'an. He emphasizes that *ilm* is not merely a means of gathering facts, but a path to draw closer to Allah and to understand the signs of His greatness. From this perspective, *ilm al-nāfi'*—or beneficial knowledge—is any knowledge that aids humanity and strengthens their faith. This perspective positions humanity as stewards on Earth and expands the concept of knowledge beyond mere academic understanding, encompassing spiritual and moral dimensions (Quraish Shihab, 2022).

Meanwhile, Imam al-Ghazālī states that knowledge (*al-‘ilm*) is the entry of the meaning of something into the soul in accordance with its original form. Knowledge is a light that illuminates the truth and guides humanity toward ma‘rifatullah, not merely a collection of facts. He emphasizes that knowledge is more important than deeds, because knowledge accompanied by faith brings happiness in this world and the hereafter, whereas deeds without knowledge are feared to lead one astray. According to al-Ghazālī, knowledge is divided into two categories. First, *fardhu ‘ain*, which is knowledge that every Muslim is obligated to learn, such as knowledge regarding faith, worship, and ethics.

Second, *fardhu kifāyah*, which is knowledge beneficial for the public good, such as medicine, commerce, and politics. Al-Ghazālī asserts that seeking knowledge is both a social and spiritual duty that defines the value of humanity and civilization. He also rejects the separation between religious knowledge and worldly knowledge, as both originate from Allah SWT and must be directed for the benefit of the community. Thus, knowledge serves as a means of devotion to Allah and the purification of the soul within the framework of Islamic epistemology (Fikriansyah, 2023).

In this context, the entire concept of knowledge in Islam demonstrates that knowledge holds a very high status as a means of purifying the soul, elevating human dignity, and strengthening faith (Al-Aṣfahānī, 2009). This understanding serves as a crucial foundation for comprehending how the Qur’an bestows special honor upon the faithful and the learned, as emphasized in Surah Al-Mujādalah, verse 11. This verse affirms that Allah will elevate the status of the faithful and the learned by several degrees, indicating that knowledge is not merely an intellectual activity but an integral part of spirituality and divine favor. Thus, the concept of knowledge developed by Al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī, al-Ghazālī, and Quraish Shihab is relevant because all of them point to the understanding that knowledge is a light that elevates the status of humanity (Mustofa et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the relevance of the concept of knowledge to divine honor is evident in the principle that knowledge fosters moral maturity, social ethics, and the ability to comprehend the signs of God’s greatness. Those with knowledge are deemed more deserving of respect because they can utilize their intellectual potential for good, correctly understand divine revelation, and provide benefits to society (Shihab, 2002). This aligns with Quraish Shihab’s view, which emphasizes that beneficial knowledge (*‘ilm al-nāfi*) does not merely increase information but shapes one’s spiritual and social character. Thus, Allah’s honor bestowed upon scholars is a logical consequence of the scholarly responsibilities they bear.

In the context of Islamic education, this understanding underscores that knowledge serves as the primary foundation for building a civilized society. Education is not merely directed toward the transfer of knowledge but also toward fostering individuals of character and integrity. Therefore, the Qur’an’s emphasis on the status of knowledge and scholars serves as a fundamental principle of Islamic education: educating humanity to understand the truth, uphold divine values, and participate in social transformation. Thus,

the verse QS. Al-Mujādalah:11 can serve as a philosophical foundation for the appreciation of knowledge and scholars within the Islamic education system.

Based on these various explanations, the author concludes that in Islam, knowledge is derived from revelation, reason, experience, and intuition, systematically organized to reveal truth and bring humanity closer to Allah SWT. Knowledge is not merely logical and empirical but also possesses spiritual and moral value, as it serves as a light guiding humanity toward ma'rifatullah, and forms the foundation for the advancement of civilization and the purification of the soul. Therefore, seeking knowledge is an obligation in Islam, whether it pertains to *fardhu 'ain*—knowledge regarding faith and worship—or *fardhu kifāyah*, which is knowledge that benefits society.

### The Status of Ulama in the Qur'an

Linguistically, the word *ulama* derives from the word *'ālim*, which refers to a person who possesses knowledge. The word *'ālim* is the *isim fā'il* form of the verb *'alima*, meaning “one who knows something.” Thus, the term *ulama* is used to refer to those who possess specific knowledge or expertise (Mahmud Yunus, 1973). Sayyid Qutb explains that ulama are those who reflect upon, understand, and delve deeply into the meanings of the Qur'an (Sayyid Qutb, 1967). Meanwhile, Hasan al-Bashri argues that ulama are those who fear the unseen Allah, are grateful for His blessings, and avoid all actions that Allah detests (Al-Maraghi, 1974).

From a sociological perspective, one's status as an ulama is not determined by formal titles alone, but through a lengthy social process. Society's recognition of an individual as an ulama stems from integrity, breadth of knowledge, moral credibility, pious conduct, and consistently demonstrated social responsibility. Thus, the title of ulama cannot be bestowed without the personal qualities that reflect such noble attributes (Dawam Rahardjo, 1993). An ulama is one who delves deeply into Islamic teachings, understands Sharia law, and conveys and applies it to society with full moral and spiritual responsibility. In the Islamic view, an ulama is not merely learned but also possesses a fear of Allah and utilizes their knowledge to draw closer to Him. This is emphasized in Surah Fatir, verse 28:

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ وَالذَّوَابِّ وَالْأَنْعَامِ مُخْتَلِفٌ أَلْوَانُهُ كَذَلِكَ إِنَّمَا يَخْشَى اللَّهَ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ الْعُلَمَاءُ  
إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ غَفُورٌ ﴿٢٨﴾

Meaning: “Indeed, among His servants, the only ones who fear Allah are the ulama. Indeed, Allah is Almighty and Most Forgiving.” (Q.S. Fāṭir 35:28)

This verse indicates that true scholars are those whose knowledge gives rise to submission, piety, and fear of Allah. The knowledge recognized by the Qur'an is not merely logical, but knowledge that leads its possessor to acknowledge the majesty and power of Allah (Fakhruddin al-Rāzī, 1999). According to M. Quraish Shihab, there is a close relationship between knowledge and piety. The deeper a person understands Allah's

creation and the signs of His greatness, the stronger their submission and fear of Allah become (Quraish Shihab, 2020). Thus, scholars are not merely those who master religious knowledge, but also those who use their knowledge to improve human life and draw closer to Allah. In Islamic tradition, scholars are regarded as the heirs of the prophets (*waratsatul anbiyā'*). They are tasked with preserving the purity of Islamic teachings, educating the community, instilling noble character, and setting an example in worship and daily conduct (Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, Kitāb al-‘Ilm).

True scholars are those who not only master knowledge but also exhibit character and behavior that reflect the depth of their understanding of Allah’s teachings. Their presence in society serves as an example because the knowledge they possess does not remain at the theoretical level but is manifested in actions filled with sincerity, devotion, and responsibility. Therefore, scholars possess a number of key traits that demonstrate their spiritual and moral qualities, while also serving as proof of their devotion to Allah SWT. It is these traits that distinguish true scholars from those who merely possess knowledge without putting it into practice. In other words, these traits serve as a measure of the excellence and nobility of a scholar’s status in the eyes of Islam. The characteristics of scholars according to Islam are as follows:

1. Fear of Allah (*khasyah*), as mentioned in Surah Fāṭir, verse 28; the trait of *khasyah* arises from spiritual awareness born of a deep understanding of Allah’s majesty, not from physical fear (Fakhrudin al-Rāzī, 199).
2. Humility (*tawadhu'*), a scholar does not act arrogantly or look down on others. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: “No one humbles himself for the sake of Allah but Allah will exalt him” (Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Birr wa al-Ṣilah, No. 2588).
3. Sincerity in seeking knowledge; the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: “Whoever seeks knowledge to seek the pleasure of Allah will enter Paradise.” This hadith emphasizes the importance of sincerity in the process of seeking and conveying knowledge (Ibn Mājah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, Book of the Introduction, No. 253).
4. Putting knowledge into practice; according to Imam al-Ghazālī, knowledge has no value in the sight of Allah without practice. True scholars are those whose knowledge prevents them from committing sins and encourages moral behavior (Al-Ghazālī, 2001).
5. Possessing noble character and being trustworthy, scholars must serve as role models in their daily conduct due to their status as a reference for the community (Ibn Kathir, 2000).
6. Upholding justice and truth, they must maintain honesty and truth without fear of human pressure, as emphasized in Quran Āli ‘Imrān verse 18 (Ibn Kathir, 2000).

7. Not using knowledge as a means to seek worldly gain. A true scholar shuns greed and does not use his knowledge for material gain or to secure a position (Al-Qaradāwī, 2018)
8. Being the heirs of the prophets (*al-‘ulamā’ waratsat al-anbiyā’*), As mentioned by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in a hadith narrated by Abu Dawud, scholars are the heirs of the prophets who spread knowledge with wisdom and compassion, not merely through intellectual acumen (Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, Kitāb al-‘Ilm, No. 3641).

Based on these various opinions, it can be concluded that scholars are people who possess knowledge, understand religious teachings, fear Allah, and use their knowledge to draw closer to Him. Ulama guide the community, uphold Islamic teachings, and serve as moral exemplars. They possess the qualities of reverence (khasyah), humility (tawadhu’), and sincerity in seeking and conveying knowledge; they practice what they know, exhibit noble character, are honest and just, and do not use knowledge as a means to seek worldly gain. With these qualities, ulama become the heirs of the prophets (*waratsatul anbiya’*) who guide the ummah through knowledge, faith, and righteous deeds.

#### **Analysis of QS. Al-Mujadalah: 11 in Tafsir Ibn Kathir and Tafsir Al-Misbah**

1. Exegesis of Surah Al-Mujadalah Verse 11: Ibn Kathir (Ibn Kathir, 2005)

Surah Al-Mujadalah verse 11 emphasizes the importance of social etiquette and respect for knowledge. Allah ﷻ says:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمْ تَفَسَّحُوا فِي الْمَجَالِسِ فَافْسَحُوا يَفْسَحِ اللَّهُ  
لَكُمْ وَإِذَا قِيلَ انشُرُوا فَانشُرُوا يَرْفَعِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ  
دَرَجَاتٍ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١١﴾

Meaning: “O you who have believed, when it is said to you, ‘Make room in the assemblies,’ make room; Allah will make room for you. And when it is said, ‘Stand up,’ stand up. Allah will surely elevate those of you who believe and those who have been granted knowledge by several degrees. Allah is fully aware of what you do.”

This verse conveys the message that being generous with space when in an assembly is a tangible manifestation of faith and praiseworthy character. Allah promises ease and convenience to anyone willing to grant space to their fellow believers. Furthermore, this verse emphasizes the close connection between faith, knowledge, and one’s rank of honor in the sight of Allah.

In the context of social ethics, this verse illustrates the principle of *reciprocity* in good deeds. This is in line with the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him): مَنْ بَنَى لِلَّهِ مَسْجِدًا بَنَى اللَّهُ لَهُ بَيْتًا فِي الْجَنَّةِ “Whoever builds a mosque for the sake of Allah, Allah will build for him a house in Paradise” (Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim). Another hadith reinforces this principle: “مَنْ يَسَّرَ عَلَى مُعْسِرٍ يَسَّرَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ” “Whoever eases

the burden of one in difficulty, Allah will ease his affairs in this world and the Hereafter” (Narrated by Muslim).

These two hadiths make it clear that every act of social kindness will be rewarded with kindness from Allah ﷻ.

Exegetes provide historical context regarding the revelation of this verse. Qatādah explains that this verse was revealed in connection with a gathering for remembrance (dhikr), where some Companions were reluctant to make room for a newcomer. The Prophet ﷺ said: “Allah will raise those of you who have believed and those who have been granted knowledge by degrees” (Quran 58:11). Ḥayyān mentions that this verse was revealed during a Friday gathering. Both of these accounts indicate that the verse encompasses social etiquette broadly, both in acts of worship and in daily interactions. The Prophet ﷺ also exemplified proper conduct in gatherings through his saying: “Let none of you remove a man from his seat and then sit in it, but rather make room and give each other space.” (Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim). This hadith highlights the importance of respecting others’ rights in public spaces. In another narration, the Prophet ﷺ taught that those of sound judgment and broad knowledge should occupy the front rows in prayer, as he said:

“Let those among you of sound judgment and wisdom stand closest to me, then those next to them” (Narrated by Muslim).

Etiquette in a gathering is not merely about seating arrangements but also reflects one’s level of social and spiritual sensitivity. The Prophet ﷺ said: “No man should sit between two men unless with their permission” (Narrated by Abū Dāwūd and at-Tirmizī). This hadith emphasizes the importance of maintaining comfort, protecting the rights of others, and demonstrates that social etiquette is part of the perfection of faith. The verse, “Allah will raise those of you who have believed and those who have been granted knowledge by degrees” (Quran 58:11), explains that Allah bestows honor upon two groups: the believers and those with knowledge. The story of Umar ibn al-Khattab appointing his former slave, Ibn Abza, as a leader due to his knowledge serves as clear evidence of this. Umar said after recalling the Prophet’s saying: “Indeed, Allah elevates some people through this Book and lowers others through it” (HR. Muslim).

Overall, Surah Al-Mujadalah, verse 11, contains interrelated ethical, social, and spiritual dimensions. Islam teaches its followers to be open-hearted in gatherings, to heed calls to goodness, and to respect those who possess knowledge. This verse affirms that knowledge and faith are the pillars of human dignity. These values remain relevant in modern life for building a civilized, equitable society that values knowledge. As stated by Wahbah az-Zuhailī in *Tafsīr al-Munīr* (vol. 28, p. 44), “knowledge is the light that elevates human dignity and is the cause of the descent of Allah’s mercy.”

## 2. Exegesis of Q.S. Al-Mujādalah Verse 11: Al-Misbah (Quraish Shihab, 2000)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمْ تَفَسَّحُوا فِي الْمَجَالِسِ فَافْسَحُوا يَفْسَحِ اللَّهُ  
لَكُمْ وَإِذَا قِيلَ انشُرُوا فَانشُرُوا يَرْفَعِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ  
دَرَجَاتٍ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١١﴾

Meaning: “O you who have believed, when it is said to you, ‘Make room in the assemblies,’ make room; surely Allah will make room for you. And when it is said, ‘Stand up,’ stand up. Allah will surely elevate those of you who have believed and those who have been granted knowledge by several degrees. Allah is fully aware of what you do.”

The prohibition against whispering explained in the previous verses is a form of moral guidance aimed at maintaining good relations among people. Whispering in the presence of others can arouse suspicion and disrupt social harmony. The following verse continues this moral guidance. While the previous verse dealt with private conversations, this verse addresses behavioral etiquette when in an assembly. It provides guidelines on how to maintain harmonious relationships when gathering together. Allah instructs the believers that whenever anyone says to them, “Make room!”, they are commanded to make space for others in the gathering. This command includes efforts to provide a seat or make general space, even if it requires some effort or inconvenience. If a believer carries out this command sincerely, Allah will ease various matters in his life. Likewise, if they are told, “Stand up!”—whether to make room for someone more deserving, to move to another place, or to perform a duty such as prayer or jihad—then that command must be obeyed. Allah promises that the obedient believers and those with knowledge will be elevated in status in this world and the Hereafter. Allah is All-Knowing of all that humans do, both now and in the future.

It is narrated that this verse was revealed on a Friday, when the Prophet (peace be upon him) was in a rather cramped space. It had become his custom to reserve special seats for the Companions who had participated in the Battle of Badr as a sign of respect for their great service. As the gathering was underway, several of the Badr Companions arrived and greeted the Prophet, then the attendees. Their greetings were returned, but no one offered them a seat.

The companions remained standing until the Prophet (peace be upon him) ordered some other companions who had not participated in the Battle of Badr to move so that the deserving companions could sit near him. This order made some of the companions feel uncomfortable, and the hypocrites took advantage of the situation to spread slander. They said, “Muhammad claims to be just, but it turns out he is not.” Upon hearing these words, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, “May Allah have mercy on whoever makes room for his brother.” The Prophet’s words were well-received by the believers, and subsequently, the verse was revealed to reinforce the Prophet’s command and example.

What the Prophet (peace be upon him) did for those companions who had rendered great service is also recognized in modern international social practices. Today, we are familiar

with what is known as protocol rules—regulations stipulating that individuals of distinguished status are granted a special place beside the head of state. This aligns with the teachings of the Qur'an, which emphasize that respect is due to those who hold certain positions and have rendered specific services.

لَا يَسْتَوِي الْقَاعِدُونَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ غَيْرُ أُولِي الضَّرَرِ وَالْمُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ  
 اللَّهِ بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ الْمُجَاهِدِينَ بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ عَلَى الْقَاعِدِينَ  
 دَرَجَةً وَكُلًّا وَعَدَّ اللَّهُ الْحُسْنَىٰ وَفَضَّلَ اللَّهُ الْمُجَاهِدِينَ عَلَى الْقَاعِدِينَ أَجْرًا  
 عَظِيمًا

Meaning: "Not equal are those believers who sit—except for those who have a valid excuse—with those who strive in the cause of Allah with their wealth and their lives. Allah has exalted those who strive with their wealth and their lives above those who sit back by one degree. To each, Allah has promised a great reward" (Quran 4:95; see also His words in Quran 57:10).

The words (تفسحوا) *tafassahu* and (افسحوا) *ifsahu* derive from the root (فسح) *fasaba*, meaning "to make room." Meanwhile, the word (انشزوا) *unsyuzu* comes from (نشز) *nusyuz*, meaning "a high place." Initially, this command was understood as an invitation to move to a higher place. In the context of the verse, this meaning is understood as a command to shift or move to another place to make room for someone more deserving of that seat, or as an encouragement to rise and engage in positive activities. Some scholars also interpret this command as an admonition for the Companions not to linger in the Prophet's house, as he might have other matters that needed immediate attention.

The word (مجالس) *majalis* is the plural form of the word (مجلس) *majlis*, which originally means "seating area." In the context of the verse, *majlis* refers to the place where the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) delivered religious teachings. However, the intended meaning is broader, encompassing any place where people are present, whether sitting, standing, or lying down. The primary purpose of this guidance is for a person to offer a suitable seat and demonstrate a spirit of yielding to those who are respected or to those in need. Even toward a non-Muslim elderly person, if a young person is sitting on a bus or train and the elderly person cannot find a seat, the praiseworthy behavior is to stand up and offer the seat to them. Al-Qurtubī explains that one may ask one's servant to go to the mosque first to occupy the desired seat. However, the servant must stand up and leave that spot when the person who sent them arrives. On the other hand, it is not permitted to place a prayer mat or other objects to prevent others from sitting in that spot. The verse does not explicitly state that Allah "exalts" the status of the learned, but it declares that they possess *ranks*—that is, a higher level of honor compared to the general body of believers. The omission of the word "elevate" implies that this noble status arises not from external factors, but from the knowledge they possess, which adds value.

The phrase (الذين أتوا العلم) *alladzina útû al- 'ilm* refers to believers who adorn themselves with knowledge. Thus, this verse divides the believers into two groups: the first, those

who believe and do righteous deeds; and the second, those who believe, do righteous deeds, and possess knowledge. The second group attains a higher status not only because of their knowledge but also because of their deeds and their role in imparting knowledge through speech, writing, or by setting an example.

The knowledge referred to in the verse is not limited to religious knowledge but encompasses all knowledge that brings benefit. In Surah Fāṭir [35]: 27–28, Allah mentions various creations and natural phenomena, then concludes the verse by stating that those who fear Him most are the scholars. This indicates that, in the Qur'an's view, knowledge is not limited to religious knowledge. Furthermore, the verse implies that knowledge must evoke a sense of awe and fear of Allah (*khasyyah*), which in turn motivates one to put their knowledge into practice and utilize it for the benefit of all creation. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) prayed: “*Allāhumma innī a‘ūdzu bika min ‘ilmin lā yanfa‘*” (O Allah, I seek refuge in You from knowledge that is of no benefit).

Based on these two exegetical studies, verse 11 of Surah Al-Mujadalah emphasizes the importance of honoring knowledge and maintaining proper etiquette in social interactions as an expression of faith and concern for others. Allah commands the believers to be generous and to stand in assemblies, which reflects noble character, social order, and respect for knowledge. According to Ibn Kathir, this verse teaches social ethics: that kindness toward others will be rewarded by Allah with generosity. The Prophet's hadith reinforces this message by emphasizing the importance of making things easy for others and respecting their status. Exegetes such as Qatādah and Muqātil bin Ḥayyān explain that this verse was revealed to admonish the Companions who were reluctant to make room in the Prophet's assembly, indicating that communal etiquette is crucial in both religious and social gatherings. Meanwhile, Quraish Shihab in Tafsir Al-Mishbah asserts that this verse continues the moral teachings from the previous prohibition against whispering, namely the obligation to respect those of higher standing and to maintain a harmonious atmosphere in gatherings. This principle is relevant in various contexts, including social, educational, and modern cultural settings.

The phrase “Allah will exalt those who have believed and those who have been granted knowledge by degrees” affirms that a person's honor in the sight of Allah is measured through faith and knowledge. The story of Umar bin al-Khattab, who honored the learned regardless of social status, reinforces this value. Overall, this verse encompasses three important dimensions: social ethics, spirituality, and intellectuality. This indicates that a civilized society arises from the fusion of faith, knowledge, and etiquette, as emphasized by Wahbah az-Zuhailī that knowledge is the light that elevates human dignity and serves as a source of Allah's mercy.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of Ibn Katsir's Exegesis and Al-Misbah's Exegesis**

From the discussion of the two commentaries above, the author concludes that Ibn Kathir's exegesis possesses several significant strengths, particularly regarding its

meticulousness in presenting textual and historical foundations. Ibn Kathir explains the verse by referring to authentic narrations sourced from the Companions, the Successors, and the Prophet's ﷺ hadiths, thereby grounding his exegesis firmly in the scholarly tradition of Islam. By employing the method of *tafsīr bi al-ma'tsūr*—that is, exegesis based on narrations—he emphasizes the close connection between the ethical teachings in the verse and the direct example set by the Messenger of Allah (Baso, 2017)

In the verse regarding making room for others in gatherings, for example, Ibn Kathir demonstrates that virtuous acts such as making space for others are part of the social etiquette exemplified by the Prophet ﷺ and the Companions. He further reinforces the meaning of this verse with another hadith indicating that social kindness is always rewarded with goodness from Allah. This approach successfully demonstrates that social ethics in Islam are not merely rules of behavior, but also a form of spiritual obedience that receives direct reward from Allah (Suharto, 2019). However, the limitation of Ibn Kathir's approach lies in its dominant focus on classical narrations, resulting in an interpretation that fails to provide insight into the verse's relevance within modern social, cultural, and educational contexts. His approach rarely engages in critical analysis of contemporary realities, as its primary aim is to preserve the authenticity of meaning based on earlier texts.

On the other hand, Quraish Shihab, through *Tafsir Al-Mishbah*, presents a different approach. He employs the method of *tafsīr bi al-ra'yi al-maqāṣidī*, an exegetical approach that emphasizes the verse's purpose, moral values, and the universal message it contains. Quraish Shihab situates this verse within a broader framework of social morality (Syamsuddin, 2017). According to him, the commands to “make room” and “stand up” are not merely instructions for the Companions during the time of the Prophet ﷺ, but universal ethical principles that guide humanity to maintain comfort, harmony, and mutual respect in every form of gathering. This approach is highly relevant to modern society as it portrays Qur'anic values as an ethical guide in social life, including in educational settings, organizations, workplace culture, and public contexts such as transportation and public services.

Quraish Shihab also expands on the meaning of “knowledge” in the verse. According to him, the knowledge referred to is not limited to religious knowledge but encompasses all knowledge that encourages humans to recognize the greatness of Allah and fosters a sense of reverence toward Him (khasyyah). The strength of Quraish Shihab's approach lies in its ability to bridge the verse's message with contemporary realities, providing readers with the space to understand the verse's practical relevance. However, its weakness lies in its greater emphasis on philosophical dimensions and moral objectives, resulting in a lack of detailed references to the accounts of the Companions or the chains of transmission (sanad) of hadith, as is done by Ibn Kathir (Zainuddin, 2020). Overall, the two commentaries complement each other and do not contradict one another. Ibn Kathir's commentary provides a strong foundation based on textual evidence derived from the Sunnah and the Atsar, while *Al-Mishbah* offers a more contextual reading that addresses

the needs of modern society. Ibn Kathir emphasizes the aspects of obedience, etiquette, and the ethics of the assembly as exemplified during the prophetic era, whereas Quraish Shihab expands its meaning into universal and enduring moral principles. By combining these two approaches, the main message of the verse becomes more complete: that human dignity in the sight of Allah rests on three main pillars—strong faith, beneficial knowledge, and social conduct that reflects care and respect for others. These three aspects complement one another and form the foundation of a civilized, harmonious society oriented toward the common good.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion outlined above, the author concludes as follows:

1. In Islam, knowledge is understood as insight derived from revelation, reason, experience, and intuition, systematically organized to reveal the truth and bring humanity closer to Allah SWT. Knowledge is not merely rational and empirical, but also spiritual and moral. Therefore, seeking knowledge is an obligation, whether as a *fardhu 'ain* or a *fardhu kifayah*.
2. Scholars are learned individuals who understand religious teachings, fear Allah, and use their knowledge to guide the faithful and uphold Islamic values. They possess the qualities of reverence, humility, sincerity, noble character, and do not use knowledge as a tool to pursue worldly interests. For this reason, ulama are regarded as the heirs of the prophets (*waratsatul anbiya*).
3. Quranic Surah Al-Mujādalah, verse 11, emphasizes the importance of etiquette, respecting knowledge, and maintaining decorum in gatherings as an expression of faith. Ibn Kathir interprets this verse as a teaching of social ethics rewarded by Allah, while Quraish Shihab views it as a universal moral guideline relevant for all times. The phrase “Allah will exalt...” affirms that faith and knowledge determine the degree of human dignity. The commentaries of Ibn Kathir and Quraish Shihab complement one another. Ibn Kathir excels in the aspects of narration and historical context, while Quraish Shihab stands out in terms of modern moral and social relevance. Both agree that human dignity in the sight of Allah is determined by a combination of faith, knowledge, and social values that shape a civilized society

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