

12806 - Ruling on the view that we should seek to acquire the characteristics of Allah

the question

One of the khateeb said in his Friday khutbah that we have to strive to acquire the attributes and characteristics of Allah. Is there a correct way of interpreting this sentence, and is there anyone who has said this before?.

Detailed answer

This sentence is not appropriate, but there is a correct way of interpreting it, which is that we are encouraged to strive to acquire the characteristics implied by the attributes and names of Allah. That means looking at the attributes which it is befitting for a created being to acquire the characteristics implied by them, unlike the attributes which belong only to Allah, such as His being the Creator, the Provider, the One God, etc. These are characteristics which a created being cannot acquire, and it is not permissible for him to lay claim to them or similar names. Rather what is referred to is the attributes which Allah likes for His slaves to acquire the characteristics implied thereby, such as knowledge, strength, mercy, forbearance, generosity and forgiveness, etc. So Allah is All-Knowing and loves those who are knowledgeable; He is Strong and He loves the strong believer more than He loves the weak believer; He is Generous and loves those who are generous; He is Merciful and He loves those who show mercy; He is Forgiving and loves forgiveness, etc. But when applied to Allah, these attributes are more perfect and greater than when applied to any created being, because there is nothing like unto Allah in His attributes and actions, just as there is nothing like unto Allah in His Essence. Rather it is sufficient for a person to have a share in the sense of these attributes, in a manner that suits him and within the limits set by sharee'ah. If his generosity oversteps the mark, then he becomes a spendthrift; if his mercy oversteps the mark, then he will not carry out the punishments dictated by sharee'ah; if his forgiveness transgresses the limits set by sharee'ah, then it is inappropriate. This was stated by the great scholar Ibn al-Qayyim in his books 'Uddat

al-Saabireen and al-Waabil al-Sayyib, and in other books such as al-Madaarij and Zaad al-Ma'aad. There follows what he said in al-'Uddah and al-Waabil:

In al-'Uddah (p. 310) he said: "Because Allah is indeed the Appreciative (al-Shukoor), the most beloved of His creation to Him are those who have the characteristic of gratitude (al-shukr), just as the most hated of His creation to Him are those who are lacking in this characteristic or who have the opposite characteristic. This applies to His Beautiful names: the most beloved of His creation to Him are those who have the characteristics implied by His names, and the most hated of His creation to Him are those who have the opposite characteristics. Hence He hates those who are ungrateful, those who do wrong, those who are ignorant, hard-hearted, miserly, cowardly and ignoble. He is Beautiful and loves beauty; He is All-Knowing and loves those who have knowledge; He is Merciful and loves those who show mercy; He does good and loves those who do good; He is the Concealer and loves those who conceal; He is Powerful and condemns those who act helpless, and the strong believer is more beloved to Him than the weak believer; He is forgiving and loves forgiveness; He is One and He loves that which is odd-numbered; everything that He loves is connected to His names and attributes; and everything that He hates is the opposite of that."

He said in al-Waabil (p. 543 of Majmoo'at al-Hadeeth): "Generosity is one of the attributes of the Lord, for He gives and does not take, He feeds and is not fed, He is the most generous of those who are generous. The most beloved of His creation to Him are those who seek to acquire the characteristics implied by His attributes. For He is Generous and loves those among His slaves who are generous; He is All-Knowing and loves those who have knowledge; He is All-Powerful and loves those who are courageous; He is Beautiful and loves beauty."

I hope that what we have mentioned will be sufficient and will serve the intended purpose. I ask Allah to help us all to understand His religion and to fulfil our duty towards Him, for He is All-Hearing, Ever Near.