179588 - Ruling on one who misinterprets the attributes of Allah, may He be exalted

the question

I want to ask about the one who denies the attributes of Allah: is he a Muslim or not? Such as the one who says that what is meant by the “hand of Allah” is the power of Allah, and they misinterpret other attributes of Allah. Is it the case that these people who deny the divine attributes are not of Ahl as-Sunnah, or are they beyond the pale of Islam altogether?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The teaching of Ahl as-Sunnah wa’l-Jamaa‘ah with regard to the Tawheed (Oneness) of the Divine names and attributes is that they believe in what it says in the Book of Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, and in that which is proven from the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), without any misinterpretation(interpreting them in a way other than they appear to mean) or likening Him to His creation, and without distorting the meaning or denying the Divine names and attributes. So they ascribe to Allah, may He be exalted, that which He has ascribed to Himself and that which His Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) has ascribed to Him.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Ahl as-Sunnah unanimously agreed on affirming and believing in all the divine attributes mentioned in the Qur’an and Sunnah, and understanding them in a true sense (as they appear to be), not as being metaphorical. But they do not discuss how any of them are. As for the innovators, Jahamis and Mu‘tazilah, and the Khaarijis, all of them deny them and do not

understand any of them in a true sense (as they appear to be).

End quote from at-Tamheed, 7/145

Secondly:

The one who denies the names and attributes of Allah altogether and does not ascribe them to Allah, may He be exalted, as is the case with the baatinis (esoteric sects) and the extreme Jahamis, is a kaafir who is beyond the pale of Islam, disbelieves in the Qur'an and Sunnah, and goes against the consensus (ijmaa') of the ummah.

The same applies to anyone who denies any of the names or attributes of Allah that Allah, may He be exalted, has affirmed in His Book; he is a disbeliever, because what is implied by his denial is that he rejects the Qur'an.

With regard to the one who misinterprets any of the attributes of Allah and distorts its meaning, such as those who misinterpret the attribute of the hand as referring to His power, and they say that istiwa' (rising over the Throne) means taking control of it, and so on, he is mistaken in interpreting it in a manner other than the apparent meaning, and he is an innovator in so far as what he believes is contrary to the Sunnah, and he has strayed from the path of Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah. But he is not a disbeliever just because of this misinterpretation, and he may be excused for his efforts to understand, depending on his level of knowledge and faith. Rather the measuring stick in that regard is the extent to which he sought to learn what the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) taught and the extent of his keenness to follow him.

Ibn Baaz (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

It is not permissible to misinterpret the divine attributes or to understand them in any way other than their apparent meaning in a manner that is befitting to Allah, or to say that knowledge of what is meant belongs only to Allah. Rather all of that comes under the heading of the beliefs of the innovators. As for Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah, they do not misinterpret the verses and hadeeths that speak of the divine attributes, and they do not understand them in a way other than

the apparent meaning, and they do not say that knowledge of what is meant belongs only to Allah. Rather they believe that every meaning (of these attributes) that may be indicated is true in a manner that is befitting to Allah, may He be exalted, without likening Him to His creation.

End quote from Majmoo‘ Fataawa Ibn Baaz, 2/106-107

He was also asked (may Allah have mercy on him):

Are the Ash‘aris among Ahl as-Sunnah wa’l-Jamaa‘ah or not? Do we regard them as being fellow Sunnis or as being disbelievers?

He replied:

The Ash‘aris are among Ahl as-Sunnah with regard to most matters, but they are not among them with regard to interpretation of the divine attributes, but they are not disbelievers either. Rather among them are some leading scholars and good people, but they erred in their interpretation of some of the divine attributes.

They differed from Ahl as-Sunnah in some issues, such as the interpretation of most of the divine attributes, in which they were mistaken. The view of Ahl as-Sunnah wa’l-Jamaa‘ah is to accept the verses and hadeeths that speak of the divine attributes as they came, without interpreting them (in a way other than the apparent meaning), denying them, distorting the meaning or likening Allah to His creation.

End quote from Majmoo‘ Fataawa Ibn Baaz, 28/256

Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azeez ar-Raajihi was asked:

If it is proven that the Ash‘aris have misinterpreted one of the divine attributes, are they to be regarded as disbelievers?

He replied: No, the one who misinterprets and misunderstands some (of the divine attributes) is not to be regarded as a disbeliever; the one who denies one of the names of Allah becomes a disbeliever. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “while they disbelieve

in the Most Beneficent (Allah)" [ar-Ra 'd 13:30]. If he denies one of the names or attributes of Allah without misinterpreting it, then he becomes a disbeliever. And Allah says (interpretation of the meaning): "The Most Beneficent (Allah) Istawa (rose over) the (Mighty) Throne (in a manner that suits His Majesty)" [Ta-Ha 20:5]. If he denies this verse, he becomes a disbeliever, but if he misinterprets it as referring to taking control, then in that case he is confused, therefore we cannot say that he is a disbeliever. End quote.

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For information on the conditions of labelling a specific individual as a disbeliever, please see the answer to question no. 107105

Thirdly:

The Khaarijis are one of the misguided sects who have gone beyond the pale of Islam. We have previously discussed them in detail in the answer to question no. 182237

For more information, please see also the answers to questions no. 145804 and 151794

And Allah knows best.