

Shaykhul Islām Ibn Taymiyyah’s

Introduction

to

al-Fatwā al-Ḥamawīyyah

A Classical Work Clarifying the Orthodox Islāmic Belief Concerning Allāh’s Names and Attributes and a Critique of those who Distort and Deny them and Revile the Understanding of the *Salaf*

Translation by Anwar Wright

The English Text of the Introduction to al-Fatwā al-Ḥamawiyyah

In the year 698 AH., *Shaykhul Islām* Abū al-Abbās Aḥmad ibn Taymiyyah was asked [this question], and because of [his] answer, matters [of hearings, judgments] and tribulations transpired. It is an answer containing tremendous benefit.

The questioner asked:

What do you say regarding the verses containing the Attributes (*ṣifāt*) [of Allāh], such as His statement (عَزَّوَجَلَّ), {The Most Beneficent (Allāh) rose over (*Istawā*) the throne} *Tāhā* 20:5, and His statement (عَزَّوَجَلَّ), {Then He rose over (*Istawā*) towards the heavens when it was smoke} *al-Fuṣṣilat* 41:11, and other verses and *aḥādīth* containing [His] Attributes, such as his saying (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), “Verily the hearts of the children of Adam are between two Fingers from the Fingers of the Most Merciful¹”, and his saying, “*al-Jabbār* [i.e. Allāh] will place

¹ Reported by Muslim no. 2654 from the *ḥādīth* of Abdullāh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Aṣ (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا).

His Foot in the Hell-Fire ...¹”, and similar *ahādith* [of this sort], and what do the scholars say [regarding them]? [Please] give a detailed answer regarding that, and may you be rewarded, if Allāh wills.

[*Shaykhul Islām*] answered:

All praise is due to Allāh, Lord of all creation. Our statement regarding [those texts containing Allāh’s Attributes] is what Allāh and His Messenger have stated, as well as what was stated by the early Muslims who embraced Islām from the *Muhājirūn*, the *Anṣār*, and those who followed them in goodness, and the rightly guided Imāms after them; those whom the Muslims agree were rightly guided and possessed correct understanding. This is what is incumbent upon all people as it relates to this subject and other than it.

Indeed, Allāh sent Muḥammad (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) with guidance and the true Religion, in order to remove mankind from [layers of] darkness into light, by the permission of their Lord, to the path of the All-Mighty, One Full of Praise.

¹ Reported by Bukhārī with a similar wording No. 4849, and Muslim 2848, from the *ḥādīth* of Abū Hurayrah (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ).

[Allāh] testified that He sent him as a caller to [his Lord] by His permission, and [sent him] as an illuminating lamp. He commanded him to say, “This is my path. I call to Allāh upon certain knowledge, I and whosoever follows me.” *Yūsuf* 13:108.

Therefore, it is impossible intellectually and religiously, that this illuminating lamp (i.e. Muḥammad) whom Allāh sent in order to remove the people from [layers of] darkness into light, and revealed to him the Book (i.e. Qur’ān) in order to judge between the people in which they differ, just as He commanded the people to return disputes in their religion back to the Book and Wisdom (*ḥikmah*) which he was sent with, along with [the Prophet] calling to Allāh and to His path upon certain knowledge, by [Allāh’s] permission, and He informed that He completed for him and his *ummah* their religion, and perfected His favor upon them; [due to this and other matters], it is utterly impossible that [the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ)] left the subject of belief in Allāh and correct knowledge concerning Him vague and ambiguous, making no clear distinction between what is incumbent towards Allāh regarding His beautiful Names

and lofty Attributes, what is permissible [to believe] concerning Him, and what is not .

Surely, knowledge of [these matters] is the foundation of the religion and the basis of guidance. It is also the best thing the hearts can acquire, what the souls can achieve, and what the intellects can comprehend. Therefore, how can that Book (i.e. Qur’ān), that Messenger (i.e. Muḥammad), and the best of mankind after the Prophets (i.e. the companions) not completely master this subject in respects to belief and statement? It is also impossible that the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) taught his ummah everything, even the etiquettes of cleaning themselves [after using the bathroom¹]¹—and said: “I have left you upon a clear white plain, its night is like its day, no one strays from it except that he is destroyed²”, and in another authentic report, “Allāh never sent a Messenger except it was a duty upon him to point his ummah to every good

¹ Reported by Muslim 262 from the *ḥādīth* of Salmān al-Fārisī (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ).

² Reported by Ibn Mājah 43, Aḥmad in his Musnad, Ibn Abu ‘Asim in his Sunnah 1/27 and declared *Ṣaḥīḥ* by Shaykh al-Albānī. See *al-Ṣaḥīḥah* 2/647 no. 937 from the of ‘al-Irbād ibn Sāriyah (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ).

that he knew for them, and to warn them from every evil that he knew would harm them¹.” And Abū Dharr (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) said, “The Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) passed away, and there was not even a bird who flaps its wings in the sky except that he mentioned to us some knowledge concerning it²”, and ‘Umar ibn Khaṭṭāb (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) said: “The Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) stood among us [one day] and mentioned the matters of the very beginning of creation all the way until the people of Paradise enter their dwellings, and the people of the Hell-Fire enter their dwellings. Those who memorized it did so, and those who forgot it did so.” Reported by Bukhārī³—so it is impossible, after him teaching them everything that would benefit them in the religion, even precise and subtle matters [like the etiquettes of using the bathroom], that he would leave off teaching them what to utter with their tongues and believe with their hearts concerning their Lord, the One whom they worship,

¹ Reported by Muslim 1844 from the *ḥādīth* of Abdullāh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Aṣ (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ).

² Reported by Aḥmad 5/153,162 and declared *Ṣaḥīḥ* by Shaykh al-Albānī in *al-Ṣaḥīḥah* No. 1803

³ No. 3192

Lord of all creation. This is because awareness of Him is the pinnacle of knowledge, worshipping Him is the greatest objective, and reaching Him is the peak of what one desires. Rather, this is the essence of the Prophetic call and the main theme of the Divine Scripture.

So, how can one who has an inkling of faith and wisdom presume that the Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) did not clarify this subject in the best and most complete manner; and since this did occur, it would be impossible that the best of his ummah and the best of its generations were careless regarding this subject, either adding to it, or taking away from it. It is likewise impossible that the praiseworthy generations—the generation in which the Prophet was sent, then those who followed them, then those who followed them—were not aware and did not profess the manifest truth in this subject, because the opposite of this would mean that they lacked this knowledge and did not speak on it, or they held a belief contrary to the truth and spoke with what opposes it, and both these scenarios are impossible as it relates to them.

As for the first, anyone who has the least amount of life in their heart, or [desire] to seek knowledge or to worship, then investigating this subject, inquiring about it, and [wanting] to know the truth regarding it would be his greatest goal—and ultimate objective. What I mean is clarification of the correct belief one must hold, [not meaning] seeking to know the exact nature (i.e. *kayfiyyah*) of the Lord and His Attributes. Pure souls desire nothing more than to have knowledge of this matter, as is known by way of the natural-disposition (*fiṭrah*) and one's instinct. So, because this is [naturally] present [within those with pure souls]—which is considered from the strongest proofs—how can one imagine that this can be absent among those elite individuals during their generations as a whole? This can almost never occur from the most dull-witted person and most obstinate one who turns away from Allāh, and the most eager of those who seek the worldly life, heedless of the remembrance of Allāh, so how can it ever occur with them (i.e. the praiseworthy generations)?

And as for [the *Salaf*] holding a belief regarding [Allāh's Attributes] that contradicts the truth, or professing [other

than it], then no Muslim or one with intellect who knew their condition would ever believe that. Further, their speech on this subject is too much to even possibly try to mention it this *Fatwā*, or in a larger work. Anyone who researches and looks into it would know this. Also, it is impossible that latecomers be more knowledgeable than the early predecessors, as some fools who have not given the *Salaf* their due respect have stated: “The way of the *Salaf* is safer, while the way of the *Khalaf* is more knowledgeable and more precise.” But rather [it is them who] do not know Allāh, His Messenger, and those who believe in Him with the true required knowledge.

These innovators who prefer the way of the *Khalaf* over the way of the *Salaf* were deluded due to believing that the way of the *Salaf* is merely belief in the wordings of the Qur’ān and *Ḥadīth* without understanding. Just like the illiterate people whom Allāh said regarding: {And there are among the [Jews] illiterates who know not the Book, but they trust upon false desires .} *al-Baqarah* 2:78. [And they believed] that the way of the *Khalaf* is extracting the understanding of the texts which are altered from their realities by using different types of

metaphors (*majāzāt*) and uncommon lexical-terminologies.

Therefore, that corrupt belief—which entails throwing Islām behind one’s back—is what brought about that [false] statement. No doubt they have lied upon the way of the *Salaf* and are misguided in ascribing correctness to the way of the *Khalaf*. Thus, they have combined between being ignorant of the way of the *Salaf* by lying upon them, and between foolishness along with misguidance by ascribing correctness to the way of the *Khalaf*.

And the reason behind this is their belief that these texts (i.e. the Qur’ān and *Sunnah*) do not point to [the reality] of any Attribute, based upon corrupt doubts which they share with their brethren from the disbelievers. So because they believed [Allāh’s] Attributes to be non-existent, along with the fact that these texts must carry a meaning, they wavered between having belief (*Imān*) in the Attribute and [claiming to] entrust [the knowledge of its] meaning [to Allāh] (*tafwīd*)—which they [erroneously] claimed to be the way of the *Salaf*—and between

distorting the Attribute to other [meanings] using somewhat burdensome [methods], and this is what they call the way of the *Khalaf*. As a result, this falsehood became a mixture of corrupt reasoning along with negation of the texts. This is because in their negation [of Allāh's Attributes] they relied upon intellectual- [arguments] which they thought to be manifest proofs but in reality, were only doubts, and at the same time they distorted the verses of the [Qur'an] from their proper context.

Hence, because they based their affair upon these two disbelieving premises, the end result was ascribing ignorance and foolishness to [the *Salaf*], and belief that they were an illiterate people; nothing more than righteous laymen who had not gained deep insight into the realities of awareness of Allāh, and did not comprehend the intricacies of divine revelation. Rather it was the “virtuous” *Khalaf* who obtained prominence in all of this.

Further, if a person was to ponder over this statement, they would find that it is the pinnacle of ignorance—nay

the pinnacle of misguidance. How can these later generations [be more knowledgeable than the *Salaf*][—] especially when those referred to here as “*Khalaf*” are a party of *ahl al-kalām* whom are confused in matters of the religion and are blindfolded from having [true] knowledge of Allāh.

And one who observed the furthestmost limits (of speculative theology) informed about the end point of the aspirations (of the theologians) when he said:

“Verily I have travelled to all the institutions [of the logicians], and I moved about frequently among those places. But I only saw people rubbing their chin in confusion, or grinding their teeth out of regret.”

Rather some of them have acknowledged this against their own selves from their statements, citing others, or what they mentioned in their own authored works, such as the statement of one of their leaders:

“The end result of pushing the intellect [pass it limits] is deadlock, and most striving done by [the logicians] is misguidance. Our souls within our bodies have feelings of loneliness, and the result of our worldly life is only

harm and evil consequence. Throughout our lifetime we have not benefitted from our research, except gathering hearsay. I have pondered over the methods of speculative theology and that of the philosophers, and I found that they do not amount to any benefit whatsoever. And I found that the soundest way is the way of the Qur'ān. I read in affirmation {The Most Beneficent rose over (*Istawā*) the throne} and {To Him ascends all good words} *al-Fāṭir*: 1. And I read in negation: {There is nothing similar to Him and He is All-Hearer, All Seer.) *al-Shūrā* 42:11, [and] {They will never encompass anything of His knowledge.} *Tāhā* 20:110. So, whoever experienced the things that I have, will know exactly as I have come to know.”

Another from among them stated: “I have embarked upon vast oceans, and I left off the people of Islām and their knowledge. I’ve indulged in what [the Scholars] have forbade me from, and now if my Lord does not grant me His Mercy, then woe to *fulān* (i.e. himself). And now here I am, dying upon the ‘*aqīdah* of my mother.”

Also, another one stated; “Those having the most doubt at the time of death are the people of speculative theology.”

Moreover, these logicians who oppose the *Salaf*, if they are investigated [and tested], [you would not find] with them any true knowledge of Allāh or factual-awareness of Him. They cannot comprehend it if was in front of them, nor would they realize it after it has passed them. So how can these blinded, deficient, reckless, confused, latecomers be more knowledgeable about Allāh and His Names and Attributes, and more precise concerning His verses and His Essence, than the foremost [to embrace Islām] from the *Muhājirūn*, the *Anṣār*, and those who followed them in goodness, from the heirs of the Prophets and successors of the messengers; the signposts of guidance, and the guiding lamps [through] darkness. Those who recited, implemented, and spread the Book (i.e. Qur’ān), and because of it they were granted aid and victory; [those] whom the Book spoke of [in praise] and they spoke with the Book; those whom Allāh granted knowledge and wisdom to the extent they stood out over the rest of the followers of the Prophets, let alone the rest of the nations

who have no book. They possessed the most sound, deep, and precise knowledge, to the point if the philosophies of every [nation] besides them were gathered next to [theirs], one would be shy to attempt to make a comparison.

Further, how can the best of generations (i.e. the *Salaf*) be less in knowledge and wisdom than these youths—in comparison to them—especially relating to knowledge of Allāh and the rulings regarding His verses and Names? Or how can the descendants of the philosophers and the followers of [the people] of Hind and the Greeks and their heirs from the magians, polytheists, and the misguided Jews, Christians, and Sabians and those similar to them, be more knowledgeable than the heirs of the Prophets and the people of Qur’ān and *Imān* (faith)?

Hence, I only began with this introduction, because the one who has it firmly established will know where true guidance lies in this subject and other than it. Just as one will know that misguidance and confusion has only prevailed over many of the latecomers due to them tossing the Book of Allāh behind their backs and turning away

from the clear evidences and guidance that Allāh sent Muḥammad (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) with. Also, them leaving off searching for the path of the early predecessors and *tābiʿīn*, and [instead] seeking knowledge of Allāh from those who did not know Him based upon their own acknowledgement, the testimony of the ummah, and countless other proofs. Further, my objective is not [to discuss] one [person in particular], however I will give descriptions of each accordingly...