

Tahreef

Based on the works of Shaykh Saalih al Fawzaan (حفظه الله)

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

QUESTION: What is Tahreef?

ANSWER:

Tashbeeh (which means trying to liken Allaah to the Creation) and takyeef (which is when a person asks ‘how’ Allaah is) are errors when describing Allaah. We will now discuss another error – a serious error – which is sadly found in much of the Muslim and non Muslim world; the error of tahreef.

Tahreef occurs when a person tries to change the meaning of an Attribute of Allaah away from its actual true meaning, and as such, is sometimes translated as ‘distortion’ of that Attribute.

Islam teaches that a person must understand the texts of the Qur’aan and the hadeeths according to their apparent meaning as understood from the Arabic language.¹

There is no place for a person to say ‘I think that this Attribute of Allaah doesn’t mean what it apparently says – I think that it means something else instead.’

The only exception to this is if there is a text somewhere else in the Qur’aan or in the authentic hadeeths which says that the Attribute should be interpreted to mean something else – i.e. that it should not be taken on its literal meaning.

For example, when it is mentioned in the Qur’aan that Allaah has a Face, then we accept that Allaah has a Face.

And the Face of your Lord, full of Majesty and Honour, will remain forever.

[Soorah Ar Rahman (the 55th chapter) verse 27]

There is nothing in the Qur’aan or the authentic hadeeths to say that this word ‘Face’ should be interpreted to mean something else.

The person, therefore, avoids making tahreef (distortion) of this Attribute ‘Face’.

¹ Refer to *al Qawaa'id ul Muthlaa* p75 of Shaykh Muhammad ibn Saalih al 'Uthaymeen for more information

Tahreef

The Qur'aan mentions:

Indeed We have sent it down, an Arabic Qur'aan, so that you might understand.

[Soorah Yusuf (the 12th chapter) verse 2]

The trustworthy spirit (the angel Gabriel) came down with it (the Revelation) upon your heart so that you will be from those who warn, using a clear Arabic language.

[Soorah ash Shu'ara (the 26th chapter) verses 193 to 195]

So the Qur'aan is in straightforward, clear Arabic, albeit with a beautiful, inimitable style.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also used straightforward Arabic when speaking to his Companions.

So we understand these two sources according to the Arabic language in which they came.