



# The Ash'arīs on True Tawhīd and Shirk

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The researcher said:

‘With respect to true *tawhīd* and that which opposes it with respect to *shirk*, and knowing such *shirk* and cautioning against it, there is no absolute mention of it in their books of creed, and I don’t know where they have (addressed the issue)? Is it in the books of *furū*? It is not in such books! Or have they abandoned this cause altogether? The latter is that of which I am certain’.

I say:

1 – You have not studied all of their books so you should not be certain in negating such things. Know that the one who is certain and sure can only be certain and sure of that which he knows for certain, and he is only deluded into negating things with certainty due to his ignorance. So he can never be certain or sure in negating things in the absolute sense. And if you don’t know if the (Ash’arīs) have mentioned this issue or not, or if you don’t know where they have addressed the issue, then say: ‘This is the conclusion that I have reached based on their books’ or ‘This is what I believe’, but don’t say ‘This what I am certain of’.

2 – Know that the Ash’arīs affirm that there is neither a creator, nor sustainer, nor benefactor, nor one who provides blessings, except Allah; and there is no one worthy of worship except Allah. It is from the bewilderment of hasty conclusions and the defects of intellect that this foolhardy researcher attributes to the Ash’arīs something whilst withholding something else because he didn’t find them mentioning the oneness of Allah (Be He Glorified) by His right to be worshipped, neither in the books of creed, nor in the book of *furū*.

The Ash’arīs provide the principles of Islamic creed in the books of creed, and they respond to various groups of disbelievers who neither believe in Allah (Be He Glorified) as the Lord of all that exists, nor in Islam as a complete way of life, nor in the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) as a prophet and messenger. If a man believes in Allah (Be He Glorified), and that the Qur’an is the word of Allah, and that the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) is the Messenger of Allah, then it is perfectly obvious that he does not direct worship except to the Master Creator (Mighty and Majestic is He).

So go to the books of *tafsīr* which the Ash’arīs have written in order to find that they have indeed stated that Allah (Blessed and Glorified be His Majesty) Alone deserves worship, and that they have

cautioned against the various forms of shirk, specifically taking a partner with Allah (Glorified be He) in worship.

Take for example, the words of Imam Al-Rāzī: ‘*Shirk* is nothing other than a person worshipping something else alongside Allah’.<sup>1</sup>

And read his words: ‘He is above what you associate with him: meaning that He is above having a partner in Ruling and Lawgiving, and above there being a partner with him in his status as the one prostrated to and worshipped, and above there being a partner with him in absolute Glorification and Majesty’.<sup>2</sup>

And also read his words:

Man ought busy himself with the worship of Allah (Glorified Be He) with utmost sincerity, and be completely free of worshipping other than Allah (Glorified Be He). As for man’s busying himself with the worship of Allah (Glorified Be He) with utmost sincerity, then that is the intent behind His saying (Glorified Be He) ‘So worship Allah in sincerity’; and as for man’s complete dissociation from worshipping other than Allah, then that is the intent behind His saying (Glorified Be He) ‘Is not the sincere religion solely for Allah?’<sup>3</sup>, because His saying ‘Is [it] not solely for Allah’ implies exclusivity.<sup>4</sup>

Imam Fakhr Al-Dīn Al-Rāzī also said:

His saying: ‘You alone we worship’ indicates that there is no other worshipped entity besides Allah; and since this is the case, it is clearly established that there is no god except Allah; and His saying ‘You alone we worship and You alone we seek for help’ indicates pure monotheism... Everyone who takes a partner with Allah will inevitably offer worship to that partner in certain aspects, either seeking its benefit, or escaping its harm. As for those who remain steadfast upon *tawḥīd* and deny that God has any partners or equals, and refrain from worshipping anything besides Allah, and pay heed to none but Allah, then their hope, fear, desire and awe is for Allah alone. Therefore there can be no doubt that they worship none but Allah, and seek the aid of none but Allah.<sup>5</sup>

3 – If you refer to the books of Al-Baqillani in creed, then you will find him explaining *tawḥīd* in terms of *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya*, when he says: ‘*Tawḥīd* means affirming that He is Absolutely Existing, One God, the Object of all worship, and there is nothing like unto Him’. He continues: ‘It is obligatory to know that the Almighty Creator of the World is One and Only; and this means that there is no god but Him, and there is none worthy of worship save Him alone’.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> تفسير الرازي: 33/16 ، الآية 30 من سورة التوبة .

<sup>2</sup> المرجع السابق: 38/16 ، الآية 31 من سورة التوبة

<sup>3</sup> سورة الزمر آية 3

<sup>4</sup> المرجع السابق: 239/26 ، الآية 2 من سورة الزمر

<sup>5</sup> مفاتيح الغيب: 1/ 244 ، 245

<sup>6</sup> الإنصاف: ص 32 ، 33

4 – Imam Nawawi (Allah have mercy on him) says about the expression *La Ilaaha Illa Allah*, ‘The best form of invocation after the Qur’an is *La Ilaaha Illa Allah*; and what this means is nothing is all existence is rightfully worshipped except Allah’<sup>7</sup>

The *mufassir* Abu ‘Abd Allah Al-Qurtubi Al-Ash’ari clearly enunciated this doctrine in the introduction to his book titled “Reflection upon the state of the deceased and the condition of the afterlife”, when he said: ‘May Allah make it purely for His pleasure... there is no lord but Him, and no entity worthy of worship but Him, Be He Glorified’.

5 – Imam Al-Izz Ibn ‘Abd Al-Salam said after mentioning the necessary attributes of *Allah* (Be He Glorified): ‘Verily, Divinity means the worthiness of being worshipped, and none deserves worship except the One who is described by all that we have mentioned’. He continued: ‘And none deserves status as God except the One who is described by all that we have resolutely affirmed’.<sup>8</sup>

6 – Imam Al-Sanusi (Allah have mercy on him) said:

There are six types of idolatry (*shirk*): 1) *shirk* implying autonomy, and that is the belief in two independent gods, as in the *shirk* of the Zoroastrians; 2) *shirk* of division, and that is the belief in a god made up of multiple gods, as in the *shirk* of the Christians; 3) *shirk* as a means of drawing close, and this entails worshipping other than Allah Almighty in order to draw near to Allah, as in the *shirk* of the ancient Arab polytheists; 4) *shirk* of imitation, and this entails worshipping other than Allah Almighty in blind following of others, as in the *shirk* of the later Arab polytheists; 5) *shirk* of causation, and this entails attributing normal causes other than Allah Almighty to natural phenomena, as in the *shirk* of philosophers and natural scientists and the students of such; 6) *shirk* of intention, and this entails working and striving for other than Allah Almighty. The first four are *kufir* by consensus (*ijmā*); the sixth is sinful; judgment on the fifth depends on certain other considerations...<sup>9</sup>

The first two types of *shirk* mentioned are at odds with *tawhīd al-rububiyyah*, and they are the *shirk* implying autonomy and the *shirk* implying division. The second two types of *shirk* are at odds with *tawhīd al-uluhiyyah*, and they are the *shirk* as a means of drawing close and the *shirk* of imitation. Al-Sanusi decided that the ruling of all these forms of *shirk* is *kufir*, and that such was by unanimous consent.

Al-Sanusi said:

The reality of the One God is that He the Necessary Being who deserves to be worshipped... and this means that nothing in existence is deserving of worship except for the One who is the Creator of the Universe (Majestic and Elevated be He)... because nothing deserves to be worshipped – meaning that all things humble themselves before it – save for He who is free of any need for all other beings beside Himself, and whom all other beings need.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> المقاصد للإمام النووي: ص 9

<sup>8</sup> العقائد للعز ابن عبد السلام: ص 11 ، 13

<sup>9</sup> شرح المقدمات للسنوسي: ص 33 ، 40

<sup>10</sup> شرح أم البراهين للسنوسي: ص 206 – 207 ، المطبوع مع حاشية الدسوقي

Al-Bayjuri said: ‘The meaning of ‘God’ is the One who is absolutely deserving of worship. And if this to be accepted as the meaning of ‘God’, this means that there is no god except Allah, and there is none deserving of worship except Allah.’<sup>11</sup>

7 – So do the Ash’arīs warn against *shirk* or not? And do they make mention of “true” *tawḥīd* – which to worship Allah Almighty alone and ascribe Divinity to none but Him – or do they not?

And perhaps you might now understand – dear brother and seeker of knowledge – that the books of the Ash’arīs focus on *tawḥīd al-rububiyah* and its rational proofs, and they have not neglected to speak about *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyah*. The Ash’arīs are free of the aspersion which you have attempted to cast upon them, namely that “true” *tawḥīd* is not mentioned in their books, neither in their books of creed nor in their books of *furū’*, and that you are certain of this.



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<sup>11</sup> حاشية البيجوري على متن السنوسية: ص 42