

Ibn Baz Fatwas

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The Meaning of 'La ilaha illa Allah'

All praise is due to Allah alone and may peace and blessings be upon the Noblest of the messengers, our Prophet Muhammad, his family, his Companions, Tabi`un (Followers, the generation after the Companions of the Prophet) and those who followed them in the best manner until the Day of Resurrection.

I have read the article written by our brother in Islam, the eminent Shaykh `Umar ibn Ahmad Al-Millibary on the meaning of 'La ilaha illa Allah'. I read the explanation of the shaykh thoroughly on the three points of view regarding its meaning. The definitions are as follows:

First, it means that there is no deity truly worthy of worship except Allah.

Second, that there is no deity truly worthy of obedience except Allah.

Third, that there is no god but Allah.

The correct definition, as he stated, is the first which is clarified in the Book of Allah (may He be Praised) many times. For instance, Allah (may He be Praised) states, ﴿ You (Alone) we worship, and You (Alone) we ask for help (for each and everything). ﴾ and, ﴿ And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him. ﴾ He (may He be Praised) also states, ﴿ And I (Allāh) created not the jinn and mankind except that they should worship Me (Alone). ﴾ and, ﴿ That is because Allāh — He is the Truth (the only True God of all that exists, Who has no partners or rivals with Him), and what they (the polytheists) invoke besides Him, it is Bātil (falsehood). ﴾

There are many Ayahs (Qur'anic verses) to this effect. Moreover, this is the meaning that the polytheists understood from 'La ilaha illa Allah', when the Prophet (peace be upon him) called them to it, saying: ﴿ O my people, say 'La ilaha illa Allah', to succeed. ﴾

They denied it and haughtily rejected to accept him because they understood that it contradicts their forefathers' worship of idols, trees and stones and their deification, as Allah (may He be Glorified and Exalted) mentions in Surah (Qur'anic chapter) Sad, ﴿ And they (Arab pagans) wonder that a warner (Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him) has come to them from among themselves. And the disbelievers say: "This (Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him) is a sorcerer, a liar. ﴾ Has he made the ālihah (gods) (all) into One Ilāh (God — Allāh). Verily, this is a curious thing! ﴾

In Surah Al-Saffat, Allah (may He be Praised) states concerning the polytheists, ﴿ Truly, when it was said to them: Lā ilāha illallāh "(none has the right to be worshipped but Allāh)," they puffed themselves up with pride (i.e. denied it). ﴾ And (they) said: "Are we going to abandon our ālihah (gods) for the sake of a mad poet?" ﴾ This indicates that the polytheists understood that the meaning of 'La ilaha illa Allah' superseded their deities and necessitated dedicating their acts of worship to Allah Alone. Thus, when one of them embraced Islam, he gave up Shirk (associating others with Allah in His Divinity or worship) and dedicated acts of worship to Allah Alone. Had 'La ilaha illa Allah' meant only that there is no god but Allah, or that there is none worthy of obedience but Allah, they would have never rejected it. That is because they already knew that Allah is their Lord and Creator Who must be obeyed in the orders they believed to come from Him (may He be Praised). Rather, they believed that worship of idols, prophets, angels, righteous people, trees and the like were their intercessors with Allah and brought them closer to Him. Allah (may He be Praised) says, ﴿ And they worship besides Allāh things that harm them not, nor profit them, and they say: "These are our intercessors with Allāh." ﴾

Allah (may He be Praised) refuted this and replied to them, stating, ﴿ And they worship besides Allāh things that harm them not, nor profit them, and they say: "These are our intercessors with Allāh." Say: "Do you inform Allāh of that which He knows not in the heavens and on the earth?" Glorified and Exalted is He above all that which they associate as partners (with Him)! ﴾ He (may He be Glorified and Exalted) also states: ﴿ The revelation of this Book (the Qur'ān) is from Allāh, the All-Mighty, the All-Wise. ﴾ Verily, We have sent down the Book to you (O Muhammad peace be upon him) in truth: So worship Allāh (Alone) by doing religious deeds sincerely for Allāh's sake only. ﴾ Surely the religion (i.e. the worship and the obedience) is for Allāh only. And those who take Auliā' (protectors, helpers, lords, gods) besides Him (say): "We worship them only that they may bring us near to Allāh." ﴾

The pagans admitted that they worshiped others only to bring them near to Allah, but Allah (may He be Praised) responded to this, ﴿ Verily, Allāh will judge between them concerning that wherein they differ. Truly, Allāh guides not him who is a liar, and a disbeliever. ﴾

Allah (may He be Praised) declared that they are both liars in the claim that their deities bring them near to Allah, and disbelievers because of committing this act. There are many Ayahs that support this meaning.

All praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds. May peace and blessings be upon our Prophet Muhammad, his family, his Companions, Tabi`un and those who followed them in the best manner until the Day of Resurrection!