

QMany people claim that we should never call a person a Kaafir; but it does not make sense to me. Why can I not call a spade a spade?

ABismillaahi walhamdulillaahi wa\$\$alaatu wassalaamu 'alaa rasoolillaahi

What is in a name?

1. All of human knowledge is based on names and their definitions. All our communication takes place through names and their definitions.

2. Names and definitions help us differentiate one entity/thing/idea from others, such as "individual" from "group" and other collective designations, "table" from "chair" and other pieces of furniture, "doctor" from "lawyer" and other professions, "walk" from "talk" and other activities, "God" from "human beings" and other creations, "Christianity" from "Judaism" and other religions, etc.

3. A name and definition makes a thing, idea, entity or concept exclusive of what it is not, in addition to describing what it is. The word "table" not only defines a piece of furniture but also identifies it distinctly and exclusive of all other pieces of furniture that are not tables. "Christian" not only defines a person with a certain set of beliefs but also excludes all non-Christians from its definition.

4. A definition of the names of the physical items/entities (chair, table, water, fire) is more easily and clearly understood according to the norms of the society that speaks a language than the names like "God" and "Christianity" which need to be more explicitly defined and elaborated to develop a common understanding and clearer communication between people who are talking about them.

5. Clear definitions help clear thinking and develop clear understanding; while vague definitions cause confusions and misunderstandings. To avoid confusions, disputes, misuses or misunderstandings, important documents contain explicit definition of their key words within the document itself so that people do not feel free to take its words or concepts to mean whatever they want or whatever suits their purpose.

6. The strange thing is that when it comes to "Islam" and "Muslim", some people want us to believe that:

1. Neither "Islam" nor "Muslim" has an official definition. Anyone can concoct any views and call it Islam and anyone can believe whatever he wants but call himself a Muslim and we have to accept his or her claim; and

2. No one has a right to tell them that what they promote is not Islam and what they profess does not make them a Muslim.

Can there be a more ridiculous position than that?

Is it possible that Allaah reveals the most important official document called the Qur-aan and tells us therein that He has approved “Islam” as our Deen, that any Deen other than Islam is not acceptable to Him, and that He has named us “Muslims”; but does not even define what “Islam” or “Muslim” is? Or is it logical that He gives us the definitions, but we are forbidden to use those definitions for any practical intents and purposes?

The main purpose of the Qur-aan was to define what Islam is and is not, and consequently, what a Muslim is and is not. Those criteria are there to be used for personal improvement and reflection, as well as for determining who is a part of the Ummah and who is not.

So what is in a name? A lot! Only a person who meets the criteria given by the Qur-aan can be called a Muslim. Everyone else is a non-Muslim for which the Arabic word is Kaafir.

Islam is a Deen of Moderation

Islam is a Deen of moderation that, if followed properly, helps people avoid extremism.

Unfortunately, when it comes to defining who is a Muslim and who is not, many Muslims have adopted extremist positions. The Qur-aan provides a logical, rational distinction between the Muslims and non-Muslims (Kuffaar) for two purposes:

1. Every individual can evaluate himself as to where he stands, what consequences he will be facing in the Hereafter, and what changes to make in his thinking, beliefs, paradigms, attitude and behaviour to change the consequences to his favour;
2. Muslims clearly know who belongs to the Ummah and who does not and thus can make decisions that are based on faith accordingly.

Unfortunately, many Muslims have deviated from the defined, moderate path of Islam and adopted extremist tendencies in two aspects of the second purpose – the use of the word Kaafir and in defining a Kaafir:

Use of “Kaafir” as a noun for anyone who is not a Muslim

- “Islam” and “Muslim” are Qur-aanic terms that must be defined according to the provisions of the Qur-aan. Only those people who comply with the Qur-aanic criteria can be called Muslims, others will be considered non-Muslim or Kaafir;
- There is nothing wrong in using the noun Kaafir to indicate or identify a person who does not subscribe to Islam;
- People should not be taunted for being non-Muslim, disbeliever or Kaafir;
- A Muslim should not be called Kaafir for difference(s) of opinion on matters of Fiqh;
- Anyone’s claim to be a Muslim should be rejected if he or she violates the Qur-aanic criteria by words or actions such as condemning Islam, criticizing the Qur-aan or challenging the authority of the Qur-aan and the Messenger, or believing in a prophet or messenger after the Prophet, etc. Such persons should be treated like any other Kaafir.

In the end, two important points must always be remembered:

1. Being Muslim or Kaafir is a matter of a person’s sincere commitment to Islam or lack of it, which is neither constant nor permanent. When the attitude, beliefs, commitment or paradigms change so will the person’s status as a Muslim or Kaafir. A Muslim may become a Kaafir or a Kaafir may repent and become a Muslim. Whatever happens, a Muslim must treat all human beings in the most excellent manner humanly possible. That is the goal that the Qur-aan and the Prophet has set for every Muslim -- excellence in conduct, dealings and attitude towards all creations of Allaah.
2. As the matters of law are only the responsibility of the state, not any individual, and as there is no Islamic state in existence today, questions about the punishment for apostasy are totally irrelevant to our current situation.

[1] A report of the teachings of the Prophet