26348 - Moulding one’s character in the way that Allaah loves based on the meanings of His names and attributes

the question

I heard one of the khateebs giving a Friday khutbah and urging the people to adopt the attributes of Allaah and to mould their character after His. Is there a correct way to understand this? Is there a scholarly precedent for this statement?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The expression to which you refer is not appropriate, but there is a correct interpretation for it, which is encouraging people to mould their character based on the meanings implied by some of the attributes and names of Allaah. That means looking at the attributes of which it is appropriate for the created being (man) to adopt the meanings implied, in contrast to the attributes which belong exclusively to Allaah, such as His being the Creator, Provider, God, etc., for these are attributes to which the created being can never aspire and it is not permissible to claim such attributes. Rather what is meant by the attributes which Allaah loves for His slaves is that they should develop the attitudes implied by those attributes, such as knowledge, strength in adhering to the truth, mercy, forbearance, kindness, generosity, tolerance, etc. For Allaah is All-knowing and loves those who are knowledgeable; He is Strong and loves the strong believer more than He loves the weak believer; He is Generous and loves those who are generous; He is Merciful and loves those who show mercy; He is Forgiving and loves those who forgive, etc. But the attributes of Allaah are more perfect and greater than the attributes of the created being (man), so there is no comparison between them, because there is nothing like unto Him in His attributes and actions, just as there is nothing that can compare to Him in His Essence. Rather it is sufficient for the created being to have a share in these attributes in the manner that befits him, within the limits set by sharee’ah. If he oversteps the limits with regard to generosity then he will become a

spendthrift; if he oversteps the limit with regard to mercy then he will fail to carry out the punishments decreed by sharee'ah; if he oversteps the limits with regard to forgiveness then he will forgive in an inappropriate manner. These are just a few examples, from which others may be deduced. The great scholar Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him) said words to this effect in his books 'Uddat al-Saabireen and al-Waabil al-Sayyib, the texts of which follow. In 'Uddat al-Saabireen (p. 310) he said: "Because He is al-Shakoor (the Appreciative) in the truest sense, the most beloved of His creation to Him are those who are characterized by the attribute of thankfulness, and the most hated of His creation to Him are those in whom this attribute is lacking, or who are characterized by the opposite. This applies to His Most Beautiful Names: the most beloved of His creation to Him are those who have the characteristic implied by that meaning, and the most hated of them to Him are those who have the opposite characteristic. For this reason He hates the kaafir, the wrongdoer, the hard-hearted, the miser, the coward, the despicable and the depraved. He is Beautiful and loves beauty; He is All-Knowing and loves those who have knowledge; He is Merciful and loves those who show mercy; He is Beneficent and loves those who do good; He is the Concealer and loves those who conceal (sins or faults); He is All-Powerful and condemns incapacity – the stronger believer is more beloved to Him than the weak believer. He is Forgiving and loves forgiveness; He is One and loves odd-numbered things. Everything that He loves is implied by His Names and Attributes, everything that He hates is the opposite of that."

And he said in al-Waabil al-Sayyib (p. 43): "Generosity is one of the attributes of the Lord, for He gives and does not take, He feeds but He is not fed. He is the most generous of those who are generous, the kindest of those who are kind. The most beloved of His creation to Him are those who bear the characteristics implied by His attributes. For He is Kind and loves those among His slaves who are kind; He is All-Knowing and loves those who have knowledge; He is All-Powerful and loves those who are brave; He is Beautiful and loves beauty."

I hope that what we have mentioned here will be sufficient. I ask Allaah to enable us all to understand His religion and to adhere to it properly, for He is All-Hearing, Ever-Responsive. Praise be to Allaah the Lord of the Worlds.