163503 - Is it permissible for people to call themselves “Ahl al-Hadeeth”

the question

I live in India and I embraced Islam in 2008 CE; I used to be Roman Catholic. I always go to the mosque now, and it is a mosque belonging to Ahl al-Hadeeth. The people in my neighbourhood call thselves Ahl al-Hadeeth more than they call themselves Muslims. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said that the group among his ummah who will enter Paradise is the one that follows Qur’an and Sunnah. I hope that you can tell me whether it is permissible to describe ourselves as Ahl al-Hadeeth or as Muslims?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

We are very happy to hear that you have become Muslim and that you always pray in congregation in the mosque. We ask Allah, may He be exalted, to increase you in guidance and steadfastness.

Secondly:

There is no reason why a group of Muslims should not call themselves Ahl as-Sunnah or Ahl al-Hadeeth, or any other names that are indicative of a Muslim’s sound methodology and following the Qur’an and Sunnah, so as to distinguish themselves from others who follow innovation. There is no doubt that the name Muslim is a good name, but… Unfortunately the Muslims have divided into various groups, so that one may be Sufi, another may be Shi‘i, and another may be”rational”.

Indeed, there are some who claim to belong to Islam but they are not Muslims, such as the Baha’is and Barelvis.

If a Muslim describes himself as belonging to Ahl al-Hadeeth, that means that he is disassociating

himself from these groups and declaring that he belongs to Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

There is no shame in declaring oneself to be a follower of the salaf, belonging to it and feeling proud of it; rather that must be accepted from him, according to scholarly consensus. The madhhab of the salaf cannot be anything but true. If a person adheres to it inwardly and outwardly, then he is like the believer who is following truth inwardly and outwardly. If he adheres to it outwardly only, and not inwardly, then he is like the hypocrite; he is to be accepted as he appears to be, and what is hidden in his heart is left to Allah (to judge), because we are not instructed to check on what is in people's hearts.

End quote from Majmoo' al-Fataawa, 1/149

Shaykh Saalih al-Fawzaan (may Allah preserve him) said:

Calling oneself Salafi, if it is true, is fine and there is nothing wrong with it. But if it is a mere claim, then it is not permissible to call oneself a Salafi when one is not following the way of the salaf.

End quote from al-Ajwabah al-Mufeedah 'ala As'ilah al-Manaahij al-Jadeedah, p. 13

It should be noted that calling themselves Ahl al-Hadeeth does not mean that they do not follow the Qur'an. Perhaps this is the reason why you are confused. Rather Ahl al-Hadeeth are those who follow both the Qur'an and hadeeth; they are the ones who adhere to the guidance of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and they are the ones who follow the Companions of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) sincerely. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

"And the first to embrace Islam of the Muhajiroon (those who migrated from Makkah to Al-Madinah) and the Ansaar (the citizens of Al-Madinah who helped and gave aid to the Muhajiroon) and also those who followed them exactly (in Faith). Allah is well-pleased with them as they are well-pleased with Him. He has prepared for them Gardens under which rivers flow (Paradise), to dwell therein forever. That is the supreme success"

[at-Tawbah 9:100].

Thirdly:

Allah has bestowed upon you another great blessing after guiding you to Islam, which is that you live among Ahl al-Hadeeth, Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah. So strive to stay close to them, follow their example and adhere to their way.

See the answer to question no. 159436 for a brief discussion on Jamaa'at Ahl al-Hadeeth in India, so that you will be more keen to stay close to them.

See the answer to question no. 12761 for further discussion on the terminology "Ahl al-Hadeeth" among the righteous predecessors (as-salaf as-saalih).

And Allah knows best.