

What is shirk asghar (lesser shirk)?

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Translated by Abu Abdirrahmaan Nasser ibn Najam

Taken from the works of Shaykh Muhammad ibn Saalih al 'Uthaymeen (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

With regards to lesser shirk, the Shaykh Muhammad ibn Saalih al 'Uthaymeen (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ)¹ states:

So shirk akbar (greater shirk) is: that which takes a person out of the religion.

And shirk asghar (the lesser shirk) is: what is less than that.

However the statement "what is less than that" is not a clear and unambiguous scale (to weigh up an action when deciding whether it is shirk akbar or asghar). For this reason the scholars have differed with regards to the guiding principle underpinning shirk asghar, upon two (different) sayings:

The first saying: is that shirk asghar is everything which the Legislator has designated to be shirk and which the texts indicate is not from (shirk) akbar.

For example:

Whoever swears by other than Allaah then he has committed shirk.

So the shirk here is asghar because the texts prove that the mere act of swearing by other than Allaah does not take (a person) out of the religion.

The second saying is that shirk asghar is whatever is a means leading to (shirk) akbar, even if the Legislation does not apply the title "shirk" to it.

For example; that a person depends upon something just like his depending upon Allaah, however he does not take (that thing) as an object of worship. So this is shirk asghar because this depending, which is like his depending upon Allaah, will cause him to be led ultimately to shirk akbar.

And this (second) definition is more encompassing than the first because the first prevents you from designating something to be shirk unless you have a proof; and the second makes everything which is a means leading to shirk (to be) an act of shirk.

(al qawl ul mufeed of Shaykh Muhammad ibn Saalih al 'Uthaymeen (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ), quoted in Mu'jam at Ta'reefaat p224)

¹ (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) (rahimahullaah) May Allaah the Most High have mercy on him