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CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM: The Essentials—PART 2

by

Jonathan M. Menn

B.A., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1974

J.D., Cornell Law School, 1977

M.Div., Trinity Evangelical

Divinity School, 2007

Equipping Church Leaders-East Africa

3701 N. Gillett St., Appleton, WI54914

(920) 731-5523

jonathanmenn@yahoo.com

www.eclea.net

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This is an examination of Islam from a Christian perspective and a comparison of major Christian and Islamic doctrines. Part 2 includes a discussion of Jesus as found in the Qur'an and looks at the character of Muhammad.

It also discusses sin and salvation according to Christianity and Islam and the radically different implications that they each have.

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VIII. The Qur'an itself places Jesus higher than anyone else (including Muhammad) and essentially gives him divine status

Muhammad said, “I am most akin to Jesus Christ among the whole of mankind” (Muslim: 2365b; see also 2365a, c; al-Bukhari: 3442, 3443; Note that he is using Jesus as the standard, not himself as the standard (i.e., he did not say, “Jesus is more akin *to me* than anyone else”). The Qur'an itself contains multiple statements that, directly or indirectly, compare Jesus and Muhammad. Not only is Jesus mentioned by name in the Qur'an five times more frequently than is Muhammad (Deedat 2002: 4), but a fair examination of the descriptions of Jesus in the Qur'an lead to the conclusion that the Qur'an places Jesus higher than anyone else (including Muhammad) and essentially gives him divine status even though official Islamic doctrine denies that. A case therefore can be made that modern Islamic apologists have downplayed and distorted Jesus, *as he is depicted in the Qur'an*, because Muslims who study Jesus' life and compare him with Muhammad would be drawn to Jesus and away from Muhammad. Those Qur'anic descriptions include the following:

A. Jesus, not Muhammad, had a miraculous conception

Former Muslim Abd al-Masih states, “As for Christ, the Quran states several times that He was not born in the normal way, as we are. His father was not a human being. He was conceived in the Virgin Mary [Q. 19:20-22] without the interference of a human father, for Allah breathed His spirit into her. This makes Christ—exclusively—the only one in the whole world who was born of the Word of God and His spirit.” (al-Masih 1993: 8)¹

¹ Hilali-Khan's translation tries to defuse the issue by having the angel Gabriel, not Allah's Spirit, “breathe into” Mary. Their translation/interpretation of Q. 21:91 says “*We breathed into (the sleeves of) her (shirt or garment) [through Our Ruh Jibrael (Gabriel)].*” They translate/interpret Q. 66:12: “*We breathed into (the sleeve of her shirt or her garment) through Our Ruh [i.e. Jibrael (Gabriel)].*” Dirks cites Q. 2:97 which says that Gabriel brought revelation to Muhammad and Q. 16:102 which says that the Holy Spirit brought revelation to Muhammad and concludes that “Gabriel is none other than the Holy Spirit . . . an angel of Allah who transmits His messages to mankind” (Dirks 2008: 197).

At least as it pertains to the conception of Jesus, interpreting the Holy Spirit as Gabriel cannot be correct. First, Q. 21:91 and 66:12 both say “*We breathed into her of Our Spirit*,” not “the angel Gabriel breathed into her.” Haleem says the Qur'an often uses the term “‘We’, the first person plural of majesty, to represent Himself [Allah]” (Haleem 2005: xx). Second, the Arabic is *rūhīnā* (from *rūh*, “spirit”), which is properly translated “*Our Spirit*.” Most translators (Ali, Pickthall, Sarwar, Arberry, Haleem) translate it that way. Mawdudi says that “the birth of Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) was not different from that of Prophet Adam, because the wording of the Arabic text in the two cases [compare Q. 21:91; 66:12 (Jesus) with 15:29; 32:9; 38:72 (Adam)] is almost identical” (A'la Mawdudi n.d.: Q. 21:91n.89). Nowhere does the Qur'an suggest that Gabriel breathed into Adam.

Concerning Adam, Mawdudi states, “‘And have breathed into him of My Spirit [*rūhī*]’ means when I have cast a reflection of My divine characteristics on him. This shows that the soul of man implies life, knowledge, power, will, discretion and other human characteristics in the aggregate.” (Ibid.: Q. 15:29n.19) Ali similarly calls the breathing in to Adam of “My Spirit” in Q. 15:29 “the faculty of God-like knowledge” and refers to it as man's “higher side, the faculty brought in by the Spirit of Allah” (Ali 2006: Q. 15:29n.1968). The same word *rūhī* translated “My Spirit” is used in Q. 38:72. With respect to Q. 32:9, the word is *rūhihi* and is translated “His Spirit.” Mawdudi says, “Allah has called this ‘Spirit’ His own either because it belongs to Him alone, and its being attributed to Himself is just like a thing's being attributed to its master, or because the attributes of knowledge, thought, consciousness, will, judgment, discretion, etc. with which man has been characterized are a reflection to the attributes of Allah” (A'la Mawdudi n.d.: Q. 32:9n.16). The Islamic website IslamAnswering.com similarly concludes, “He has created man by breathing into him of His own Spirit (Qur'an, 15:29; 32:9; 66:12). Since God is the absolute infinite good and His Spirit the absolute perfect one; since man, through creation, received of the Spirit of God, then man was bound to retain at least some portion of this good Spirit of the Creator.” (“The Concept” 2009: n.p.) Therefore, the “Spirit” in Q. 21:91 and 66:12 (pertaining to Jesus) and 15:29; 32:9; and 38:72 (pertaining to Adam) cannot refer to the angel Gabriel.

Q. 2:87, 253, and 5:110 all say that Allah “*strengthened him [Jesus] with the holy spirit [Ruh Al-Qudus]*.” That term is always translated “Holy Spirit” (Ali, Pickthall, Shakir, Sarwar, Arberry, Haleem; see also Q. 16:102). Reynolds points out, “These verses [Q. 2:87, 253; 5:110] suggest that by ‘Holy Spirit’ the Qur'an does not mean an angel, and that the Qur'an uses this expression in a manner parallel to the Bible . . . to mean a divine power. This idea matches the way the Qur'an speaks of God's ‘Spirit,’ which is active in creation (Q 15:29; 32:9; 38:72) and revelation (Q 16:102; 26:192-93) at the command of God (Q 17:85).” (Reynolds 2018: 427) Nevertheless, Hilali-Khan again bring Gabriel into the verses for theological not lexical reasons by saying “*supported him with Ruh-ul-Qudus [Jibrael (Gabriel)]*.” While some other commentaries likewise maintain that Gabriel is what is meant (e.g., Ibn Kathir 2003: Q. 2:87, comment; Jalal 2013: Q. 2:87, comment), not all do. Ali maintains that Q. 2:87 means that Allah “by His word gave him [Jesus] spiritual strength—‘strengthened him with the holy spirit’” (Ali 2006: Q. 3:32n.401; see also A'la Mawdudi n.d.: Q. 2:87n.93 [“It also denotes the holy spirit of Jesus, the spirit which God had endowed with angelic character”]).

Q. 58:22 says that Allah has “*strengthened them [true believers] with a spirit from Himself*.” Ali comments:

Regarding the miraculous and supernatural conception of Jesus, most Muslims emphasize **Q. 2:117; 3:47, 59; 19:21, 35** to the effect that Allah only has to say “Be!” and anything he wishes (including Jesus) is created (see also **Q. 16:40; 36:82; 40:68**). They also tend to downplay the uniqueness of Jesus by comparing him to Adam, i.e., “If it is said that he was born without a human father, Adam was also so born. Indeed Adam was born without either a human father or mother.” (Ali 2006: Q. 3:59n.398; see also A’la Mawdudi n.d.: Q. 3:59n.53; Ibn Kathir 2003: Q. 3:59, comment; Deedat 2002: 25-26) However, Adam and Jesus are fundamentally different for at least three reasons:

- First, Adam was *created* from pre-existing material—the dust of the ground as a fully-formed adult, because, as the first human being, it was not possible to be born of human parents (**Gen 2:7; Q. 3:59; 7:12; 32:7; 38:76**). However, Jesus was not “created” but was *procreated*, supernaturally and contrary to the natural means which had applied to every other person since Adam and Eve. The reason for this clearly relates to who Jesus is and his unique mission on earth. Before his birth, the angel Gabriel announced both his identity and his mission: in **Luke 1:35** he said that Jesus will be the *Son of God*; in **Matt 1:21** he said, “*He will save his people from their sins.*”
- Second, in all other human beings, including Adam, God’s “breathing in” to them is what gives human beings their soul; it makes humans higher than animals (Ali 2006: Q.32:7-9, nn.3637-40; see **Gen 2:7; Q. 15:29; 32:9**). However, in the case of Jesus, Allah breathed His Spirit *into Mary*, not into Jesus, in order to incarnate Jesus in a direct and unmediated way (**Q. 21:91; 66:12**). God did *not* have to breathe into Jesus to give him a soul “because Jesus had long existed in the divine realms before his conception on earth” (Gilchrist 2015: 67). Because Jesus had eternally pre-existed, “he had to be born of a virgin woman. He could not have been procreated through both a father and mother as a new person entirely, distinguished purely by his parents’ genes and DNA” (Ibid.).
- Third, Adam and Jesus are complete *contrasts*: Adam is from the earth, but Jesus is from heaven (**1 Cor 15:47**); Adam was just an ordinary man, but Jesus is a life-giving spirit (**1 Cor 15:45**); in Adam all die, but in Christ all shall be made alive (**1 Cor 15:22**).

Finally, the Qur’an does *not* simply say that Allah said “Be!” and Jesus was created. It is far more specific regarding the supernatural conception of Jesus. **Q. 21:91** says, “*And (remember) her [Mary] who guarded her chastity: We breathed into her of Our spirit, and We made her and her son a sign for all peoples.*” **Q. 66:12** adds, “*Mary the daughter of ‘Imran, who guarded her chastity; and We breathed into (her body) of Our spirit; and she testified to the truth of the words of her Lord and of His Revelations, and was one of the devout (servants).*”² Regarding this verse, Mawdudi states, “That is, without her having any connection with a

“Allah strengthened the Prophet Jesus with the Holy Spirit. Here we learn that all good and righteous men are strengthened by Allah with the Holy Spirit. If anything, the phrase used here is stronger, ‘a spirit from Himself’. Whenever anyone offers his heart in faith and purity to Allah, Allah accepts it, engraves that Faith on the seeker’s heart, and further fortifies him with the divine spirit, which we can no more define adequately than we can define in human language the nature and attributes of Allah.” (Ali 2006: Q. 58:22n.5365) Sam Shamoun states, “In order for this Spirit to be able to strengthen all true believers at the same time he must be personally present with all of them wherever they are at and must have the divine power to protect and preserve them all” (Shamoun, “Quran” n.d.: n.p.) Thus, the “Spirit” cannot be Gabriel who is limited to being in only one place at a time and is never said to appear to all believers.

Muhammad confirmed that the “Spirit” communicated to Jesus is not Gabriel. He said, “He who said: ‘There is no god but Allah, He is One and there is no associate with Him, that Muhammad is his servant and His messenger, that Christ is servant and the son of His slave-girl and he (Christ) His word which He communicated to Mary *and is His Spirit*, that Paradise is a fact and Hell is a fact,’ Allah would make him (he who affirms these truths) enter Paradise through any one of its eight doors which he would like” (Muslim: 28a; see also al-Bukhari: 3435; at-Tirmidhi: vol. 1, book 46, no. 3616, *emph. added*). Since Christ “is His Spirit,” the “Spirit” cannot be referring to Gabriel, because Christ is not the angel Gabriel.

The Qur’an names the angel Gabriel by name on occasion (see **Q. 2:97**). **Q. 16:2; 70:4; 78:38** distinguish “*the Spirit and the angels.*” The “angels,” of course, would include Gabriel. **Q. 17:85** (Hilali-Khan) reports, “*And they ask you (O Muhammad SAW) concerning the Ruh (the Spirit); Say: ‘The Ruh (the Spirit): it is one of the things, the knowledge of which is only with my Lord. And of knowledge, you (mankind) have been given only a little.’*” Note that Muhammad did not identify the Spirit as Gabriel; instead, he admitted his relative ignorance and indicated that the Spirit was uniquely within the knowledge of the Lord. That makes the Spirit divine (i.e., God himself) since the essence of God (Allah) cannot be comprehended by human beings but only by God himself (e.g., **Q. 6:103**: “*He is above all comprehension*”; **Q. 42:11**: “*there is nothing whatever like unto Him*”). Consequently, for Muslim commentators and translators to maintain that when the Qur’an says Jesus received the “Holy Spirit” or “Our Spirit” the angel Gabriel is being referred to amounts to both “special pleading” (i.e., a fallacious argument that involves claiming, without justification, an exception to a generally accepted rule or principle) and “begging the question” (i.e., assuming in advance that which must be proved).

² The Arabic wording of **Q. 21:91** and **66:12** is significant. It shows a far more “intimate” connection between Allah and

man, Allah breathed into her womb a Spirit from Himself” (A’la Mawdudi n.d.: Q. 66:12n.28).

In contrast to the unique and supernatural conception of Jesus, “It is common knowledge that the father of Muhammad was Abdallah; and his mother, Amina. . . . He was born in a natural way as we all are, from a human father and a human mother.” (al-Masih 1993: 8) Even here, the Qur’an contrasts Jesus and Muhammad by how it contrasts their mothers. Mary is named 34 times in the Qur’an; she is called “a woman of truth” (Q. 5:75) and “a sign for all peoples” (Q. 21:91; see also 23:50). Q. 3:42 states, “O Mary! Allah hath chosen thee and purified thee—chosen thee above the women of all nations.” In contrast to Mary, Muhammad’s mother is never mentioned even once in the Qur’an.

B. Jesus, not Muhammad, is the “Word” of God

Q. 3:45 says, “Behold! the angels said: ‘O Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to Allah’” (see also Q. 3:39; 4:171). Masih states, “All the prophets heard the Word of God and transcribed it sincerely. As for Christ, He not only heard the inspired Word, He Himself was the incarnation of the divine Word.” (al-Masih 1993: 10) The Arabic wording confirms this: “The key issue is that Jesus *himself* is called a Word from Allah – *kalimatim-minhu* – a Word from *him*, and *kalimatuhu* – *his* Word. It is the suffix *hu* (him) that gives the title its special definition. A word did not come to Jesus like those that came to the prophets before him, *he himself* is the Word that came from *Allah himself*.” (Gilchrist 2015: 140-41) Muslim professor Ayoub agrees: “He [Jesus] represents a special creation; he is the Word of God injected into the human plane of existence” (Ayoub 1980: 93).³

Mary than most Muslims acknowledge. Hilali-Khan try to downplay this by translating Q. 21:91 as, “And (remember) she who guarded her chastity [Virgin Maryam (Mary)], We breathed into (the sleeves of) her (shirt or garment). . . .” They translate Q. 66:12: “And Maryam (Mary), the daughter of ‘Imran who guarded her chastity; and We breathed into (the sleeve of her shirt or her garment). . . .” Mumim Salih, a former Muslim, discusses this: “The above translation is completely deceptive. The word ‘her chastity’ was used as a translation to the Arabic word ‘farjaha’, which is far from true. The Arabic root word ‘farj’ means the female genital organ (vagina to be precise). . . . The Arabs refer to a woman with chastity by using words like ‘afifa’ or ‘sharifa’, with no need at all to refer to her genital organ. The deceptive translation is also evident in using the word ‘breathed into’ as a translation to the Arabic word ‘nafakhna feeha’, which means ‘we blew into her . . .’. The Quran meant to say ‘into her genital organ/vagina’, but the translators talk about sleeves and shirts! I suppose if we ask the translators why did they bring the clothing issue here, their answer would be that the blowing process happened discretely without having to uncover her! . . . The Quran refers to the same story in surat Al Tahreem (66:12), but uses the Arabic words ‘nafakhna feehy’ instead of nafakhna feeha, leaving no room at all for changing the meaning. Nafakhna feehy means ‘we blew into her organ’ which clarifies where the blowing process happened. The correct wording for Q.66:12 would have been: ‘And Maryam, the daughter of Imran who guarded her genitals; and We blew in it from our spirit’. Despite such clarity, the translators [Hilali-Khan] insist on bringing irrelevant and redundant issues of sleeves, shirts and garments to the verse.” (Salih 2007: Blowing into Mary!)

In the biblical account, Gabriel explained to Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35; see also Matt 1:18-23). “Nothing in [the biblical account] suggests that actual intercourse took place between God and Mary. The words *come upon* and *overshadow* in verse 35 do not imply sexual relations, and Luke here describes with great delicacy an incomprehensible event.” (Schreiner 1989: 806) On the other hand, in the Qur’an’s account, Allah did *not* simply say “Be!” to create Jesus. Instead, Allah was intimately involved in the creation of Jesus and clearly played the role of the father. He breathed His Spirit *into Mary* (into her vagina) in order to incarnate Jesus. That is far more explicit and more sexually suggestive than the biblical account. This renders the rhetorical question in Q. 6:101, “How can He [Allah] have a son when He hath no consort?” particularly nonsensical. The Qur’an’s account does indeed “imply that Allah was the father of Jesus.” If God is not Jesus’ father, then who is? Since God *is* Jesus’ father, that makes Jesus God’s “Son” in a way different from all other human beings.

³ When Jesus is called the “Word” of God, some Muslim exegetes point to Q. 3:47, 59 and claim that he is called the “Word” because, like the creation of Adam, Allah created Jesus by his word—“Be!” (see Q. 3:45, Hilali-Khan; Ali 2006: Q. 3:59n.398; Q. 4:171n.676; Ibn Kathir 2003: Q. 4:171, comment). That is not correct for at least four reasons:

- First, “If the expositors claim that what is meant by ‘Word’ is the verb ‘be’ (*kun*) or speech in other texts there is no way they can claim this meaning in this instance. The words, ‘a Word from him whose name is Messiah’ shows that the Word here is a person and not an utterance or command as will be clear upon the slightest reflection. It is almost like saying, ‘A being from him.’ Notice that the pronoun in the Arabic *ismihi* (‘whose name’) is masculine referring to *kalima* (Word) which in Arabic is feminine phonetically but masculine in meaning; otherwise, linguistically it would not be permissible.” (Ghabril 2003: 31) A hadith confirms this. In *Sahih al-Bukhari* (vol. 6, book 60, no. 236) Jesus is called “His [Allah’s] Word which He sent to Mary.” Rick Brown puts it this way, “The usage in the Qur’an is clearly incarnational, and John the Baptist is called to bear witness to Jesus as the Word (3:39, 45; 4:171). Note as well that although *kalima* ‘word’ is feminine in Arabic, it is construed in these verses as masculine, even before the conception,

Muhammad is not called the incarnate Word in the Qur'an. D. A. Carson summarizes, "Jesus is not presented merely as the one who brings his Father's message, the way Muhammad is presented in Islam as the final prophet who brings Allah's message; rather, in important ways, Jesus *is* the message, he *is* the Word, as well as bringing it" (Carson 2008: 53).

C. Jesus, not Muhammad, is the "Spirit" from God

Q. 4:171 calls Jesus "*a spirit proceeding from Him [i.e., Allah].*" Gilchrist notes, "Jesus is not only a Word *from* Allah, he is also a Spirit *from* Allah. The same Arabic words are used – *min-hu* – 'from him'. No other prophet is given this title in the Qur'an or is said to have come *from* Allah. . . . Some say the Qur'an is talking about the spirit that breathed Jesus into life when he was born of a virgin woman. . . . Surah 4.171, however, says that Jesus himself is a spirit from Allah, not that he received a spirit from him. There are eternal distinctions between the two." (Gilchrist 2015: 144, 145)

In the Hadith, Muhammad himself said that one of the truths one must affirm to enter Paradise is that Christ is "*His word which He communicated to Mary and is His Spirit*" (Muslim: 28a; see also al-Bukhari: 3435; at-Tirmidhi: vol. 1, book 46, no. 3616, *emph. added*). No claims like that are made in the Qur'an with respect to Muhammad.

D. Jesus, not Muhammad, is "the Messiah"

On multiple occasions, the Qur'an refers to Jesus as "the Messiah" (**Q. 3:45; 4:157, 171-72; 5:72, 75; 9:30**; the Arabic is "al-Masih"). Memsuah Mansoor explains, "The Arabic word, 'masih' differs from 'mamsuah' in that 'mamsuah' simply means 'anointed' and signifies a lesser anointing. 'Masih' however, is based on the grammatical form which emphasizes the fact of the anointing being possessed by someone or something. It is an 'intensive form' that often indicates 'a very high degree of the quality which their subject possesses or an act which is done with frequency ... by their subject.'" (Mansoor n.d.: n.p.)

Al-Masih "is the *only* title prefixed to the name of any prophet in the Qur'an. . . . [This indicates] that there was something very distinctive about Jesus, that he was in some way exalted above all the other prophets of Allah." (Gilchrist 2015: 121, 123) Although Jesus is given the title "al-Masih," the meaning of that term or of his special "anointing" is not defined or described. The description of Jesus as "the Messiah" (al-Masih), clearly comes from the Bible, since "Christ" (Greek = *Christos*) is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew "Messiah" (Danker 2000: *Christos*, 1091), and "the Qur'anic *al-Masih* 'Isa is simply an Arabic translation of this same name and title, meaning literally 'the Christ, Jesus' or more specifically 'the Messiah Jesus.' This explains why the Qur'an makes no attempt to explain the title – its use alongside the name Jesus was extremely common among Christians and was simply accepted and admitted." (Gilchrist 2015: 124) Mansoor points out, "Since it is referring to a person referred to in the Hebrew language, the title 'masih' should not be separated from the fullness of the meaning which it held in the Hebrew context. Though not always admitted in Islamic doctrine, the significance that the Jewish Messiah had is brought across in the Arabic grammar because 'al' makes

as a 'word from God, his name is Jesus.'" (Brown 2002: 27n.2)

- Second, the Muslim argument mistakes cause for effect. Ghabril explains, "If God created Isa, the Christ, by a word of command (*kun*, in Arabic) as they allege, he could not be called (*kalima*) word, because he is not the word but the effect of the word (in the command). If I write a book with my mind, that book is not called a mind (or my mind) but the object of the mind. Otherwise, truth will be mixed with error, and essentials will be confused with accidentals." (Ghabril 2003: 31) The "Word" clearly is Jesus, i.e., an entity transmitted to a recipient, because **Q. 4:171** says that the word was "*bestowed on Mary*" (Ali; Hilali-Khan) or "*conveyed to Mary*" (Sarwar; Pickthall [*"conveyed unto"*]).
- Third, Sundiata points out, "God's Word or any person's word, whether spoken, written, or expressed by some sign, is an expression of the mind. Since only Jesus is called 'the Word of God' in the Qur'an, it follows that the Qur'an regards Jesus alone as the divine expression, which is exactly what the apostle Paul explained to the Colossians in the Bible (Col. 2:9)." (Sundiata 2006: 204)
- Fourth, even though Adam was created out of dust with no physical parents, the Qur'an never calls him a "Word" of Allah as it calls Jesus. Therefore, calling Jesus the "Word" of God, but not similarly calling Adam a "Word," cannot simply be a way of referring to the supernatural manner of Jesus' conception but is, in fact, a way of *distinguishing* Jesus from Adam despite their supernatural conceptions.

Because the Qur'an does not itself define or describe the *meaning* of Jesus as the "Word," that meaning can only have come from the Bible which first described Jesus as the "Word." Jesus is pre-eminently described as the "Word" in **John 1:1, 14**: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth*" (see also **Rev 19:13**). Given this background, the only plausible meaning of Jesus as the "Word" in the Qur'an is that Jesus is the incarnation of the divine Word.

reference to ‘a previously known’ or ‘specific’ *masih*, and is often used to indicate the greatest one.” (Mansoor n.d.: n.p.)

Muslim professor Abdul-Mohsin admits that “the Jews expected the Messiah to come in one of three forms: 1. A king [citing **Jer 23:5-6; Ps 110:1-2**]. 2. A priest [citing **Zech 6:12-13; Ps 110:3-4**]. 3. A prophet [citing **Deut 18:18-19**].” (Abdul-Mohsin 2006: 95-97) Importantly, the Messiah was not merely to be “a king” but was to be “the king”—the *final* king of the world. Louis Jacobs writing in the *Jewish Virtual Library* says, “In rabbinic thought, the Messiah is the king who will redeem and rule Israel at the climax of human history and the instrument by which the kingdom of God will be established. While the Bible stresses the nature of the age called the ‘end of days,’ the rabbis focus as well on the person of their regent, who gives the messianic age (*yemot ha-mashi'ah*) its very name.” (Jacobs 2008: Messiah in Rabbinic Thought) Many OT passages indicate that the Messiah would be a human being (e.g., **Gen 3:15; Isa 11: 1-5; 42:1-6; 59:20; Jer 30:18-22; 33:14-15**); however, other passages suggest that the Messiah would be divine (e.g., **Ps 2:6-12; 110:1-7; Isa 9:6; Jer 23:5-6; Mic 5:2; Zech 14:9**).

The NT clearly shows that Jesus Christ fulfills the Israelite expectations of a king and savior sent by God (see, e.g., **Matt 2:4-11; 16:16, 20; 22:42-45; 26:63-64; Mark 8:29; 12:35-37; 14:61-62; Luke 4:41; 20:41-44; 22:67-70; 23:2-3, 39; 24:26, 46; John 4:25-26; 11:25-27; 20:30-31; Acts 2:30-36; 9:22; 17:3; 18:5, 28; 1 John 2:22; 5:1**). Jesus was the prophesied king. This was recognized at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry (**John 1:49**, “*Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel*”) and when Jesus entered Jerusalem the final time, which all four Gospels interpret as the coming of the prophesied Davidic king (**Matt 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-16**). Jesus also is the perfect high priest in the true Temple (**Heb 2:17; 4:14-5:10; 7:1-8:6; 10:11-22**). Finally, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Moses that God would raise up another prophet like him (see **Deut 18:15, 18-19; John 1:45; 6:14; Acts 3:20-23**).

Because Jesus is “the Messiah,” and the Messiah is the final, eschatological prophet, priest, and king, Muhammad could not be the “last” of the prophets, since that role is uniquely fulfilled by the Messiah, i.e., Jesus. Since even the Qur’an recognizes that Jesus is “the Messiah,” the meaning of that term can only be the meaning that *Jesus himself gave it*. That meaning can only be found in the NT, because only the NT records in detail what Jesus said and did to lead to the (unexpected) conclusion that he was, in fact, the Messiah. Because the Qur’an is using a biblical term (“the Messiah”) and says that it simply confirms prior revelation (**Q. 2:41, 89, 97; 3:3; 4:47; 5:15, 48; 6:90, 92; 10:37; 12:111; 35:31; 46:9, 12, 30**), and because it says that “*We believe in . . . what was given to Musa (Moses), ‘Iesa (Jesus) and the Prophets from their Lord*” (**Q. 2:136**, Hilali-Khan), it must therefore accept the Bible’s revelation of *what* “the Messiah” means and *why* Jesus is the Messiah—and that includes that Jesus is divine, since part of the biblical description of Messiah is that he is divine.

There is one more significant aspect to the Qur’an’s calling Jesus “the” Messiah (al-Masih): “In Arabic, *al* is always equal to ‘*the*’ and it is attached to names which are attributed to god only. This is why all the 99 names of Allah start with *Al* or *The*. Take note however, that *The* is not part of the name. It is just a device used to indicate that the name is unique to god—only god can be given this distinction. For example, we cannot say ‘The Muhammad,’ because Muhammad is just the name of a person. It is interesting to note that the Messiah is called Al-Maseeh in the Qur’an. It means he is the only Messiah in the whole world. He is the only man in the Qur’an who has *Al* or *The* attached to his name.” (Prince 2011: 5; see also Mansoor n.d.: n.p.)⁴ The Qur’an never refers to Muhammad or any other prophet as “*masih*,” let alone “*al-Masih*.”

E. Jesus, not Muhammad, is pure, holy, and without sin or error from his birth

The Qur’an tells us that Adam disobeyed Allah (**Q. 20:116-21**); Moses killed the Egyptian (**Q. 28:15-16**); David made a hasty and wrong judgment or had Bathsheba’s husband killed so that he could marry her (**Q. 38:21-24**);⁵ several of the prophets asked forgiveness for their sins: Noah (**Q. 11:47; 71:28**), Abraham

⁴ In trying to reduce Jesus to the level of other prophets, Deedat says that the Greek *christos* means “anointed” and that many things and people in the Bible are said to be anointed (Deedat 2002: 13-14). While that is true as far as it goes, Deedat omits the most significant fact: “The title given to Jesus in the Bible is actually (in the original Greek) *ho Christos*, that is, ‘the Christ’. The use of the definite article renders the title exclusive in a very real sense and reveals that Jesus was indeed *the Messiah*, God’s Anointed One, in a way that none of the other prophets were.” (Gilchrist 2010: 8)

⁵ Some Islamic commentators deny that this incident is related to Bathsheba and Uriah, but claim that it refers to David’s rendering judgment based on hearing only one litigant’s story (see Ali 2006: Q. 38:24n.4176-A, Q. 38:26n.4178). Others, including apparently the earliest commentators, relate this to the biblical account of David, Bathsheba, and Uriah. However, they deny that David actually committed adultery with Bathsheba but say only that David saw her, fell in love with her, and made sure that Uriah was killed in battle so that he could marry her. (See Asad 1980: Q. 38:21n.22; Jalal 2017: Q. 38: 22, 24, comment)

(**Q. 14:41; 26:82**), Solomon (**38:30-35**); Muhammad himself was rebuked by Allah and needed forgiveness for his sins both past and future (**Q. 8:67-68; 9:43; 40:55; 47:19; 48:1-2**; see Abdul-Mohsin 2006: 69-75; Ghabril 2003: 13-20). The words used in all of these instances are standard Arabic words “which throughout the Qur’an are used to express the act of asking forgiveness for sins against God [not mere ‘faults’ or ‘errors in judgment’]” (Gilchrist 2015: 72-75).

Jesus alone was different. Although the Qur’an lists sins for the other prophets including Muhammad, no sins are recorded for Jesus because he never committed any. Abbas Sundiata observes an important corollary of this: “Even when we do not sin, we remain sinners—it is our heritage as human beings. In contrast, God does not have such inclinations. Therefore, if God lived among men as a man, then the one thing that would attract attention to Him and distinguish Him from others would be the perfect life He would live, because God cannot sin.” (Sundiata 2006: 201) **Q. 19:19** says an angel announced to Mary that, although she was a virgin, she would be given “*a holy son*” (Ali), “*a faultless son*” (Pickthall), “*a righteous son*” (Hilali-Khan), “*a boy most pure*” (Arberry; see also Sahih, Shakir, Sarwar, Haleem). Abd al-Masih states, “The Muslim scholars al-Tabari, al-Baidawi, and al-Zamakhshari agreed that the expression ‘most pure’ means blameless, guiltless and sinless. Before Christ was born, divine inspiration declared that the one who was going to be born out of the spirit of God would always live pure, without a single sin. There was no need to purify His heart, for He was holy in Himself. The Son of Mary did not hear the Word of God only; He was it. There was no difference between His actions and His words. He remained blameless and without sin.” (al-Masih 1993: 13) Mawdudi concludes, “God endowed Jesus with a pure, impeccable soul. He was therefore an embodiment of truth, veracity, righteousness, and excellence.” (A’la Mawdudi n.d.: Q. 4:171n.213) The uniqueness of Jesus is highlighted by Muslim professor Mahmoud Ayoub: “Jesus is therefore free from the taint of evil and impurity. . . . This purity, which Adam had till he was touched by Satan’s finger and thus lost it, now remains exemplified by Jesus alone.” (Ayoub 1980: 93)

Unlike Jesus, “the Prophet [Muhammad] is sometimes even censured in Qur’an” (Haleem 2005: xv). In **Q. 8:67-68** Muhammad is rebuked for accepting ransom from prisoners taken at the battle of Badr in 624 CE. In **Q. 9:43** Muhammad is censured for having given permission for some of his fighters to stay at home before the battle of Tabuk in 631 CE. In **Q. 66:1** (Sarwar) Muhammad is rebuked for “*mak[ing] unlawful that which God has made lawful*.” Twice in the Qur’an, **Q. 40:55** and **47:19**, Muhammad is commanded to “*ask forgiveness for thy fault*” (see also **Q. 110:3**). Arberry, Shahih, Pickthall, Sarwar, and Haleem translate **Q. 40:55** as “*for your sin(s)*.” John Gilchrist points out that in **47:19** the Arabic words for “*ask forgiveness for thy sin(s)*” are *wastaghfir lithanbik* “which are exactly the same words used when Zulaykah (the Muslim name for Potiphar’s wife) is commanded to repent of her desire to seduce Joseph [in **Q. 12:29**]” (Gilchrist 2002: 48). **Q. 48:1-2** affirms that Muhammad committed sins both before and after his calling as a prophet.

Muhammad himself admitted sinning and asking Allah’s forgiveness for his sins. At the end of one prayer he said, “O Allah, to Thee I turned my attention, and by Thee I disputed, and to Thee I brought forth my case, so *forgive me my former and latter sins, and my secret and open sins*” (Abi Dawud: 771, emph. added; see also Abi Dawud: 760, 761). Another hadith records, “When the Prophet uttered salutation at the end of the prayer, he used to say: ‘O Allah, forgive me my former and latter sins, what I have kept secret and what I have done openly, and what I have done extravagance; and what You know better than I do.’” (Abi Dawud: 1509) He also admitted to faults, ignorance, immoderation, serious and deliberate sins (Muslim: 2719a). In fact, other ahadith report that Muhammad admitted having to repent *one hundred times a day!* “The Messenger of Allah (saas) said: ‘I seek the forgiveness of Allah and repent to Him one hundred times each day’” (Ibn Majah: 3815; see also al-Bukhari: 6307; Ibn Majah: 3814; at-Tirmidhi: 3434; Muslim: 2702a, 2702b; Abi Dawud: 1516). The last words his wife Aisha heard before he died was Muhammad’s begging Allah for forgiveness: “When the Prophet fell sick with the sickness that would be his last, I took his hand and wiped it over his body and recited these words. He withdrew his hand from mine and said: ‘*O Allah, forgive me* and let me meet the exalted companions (i.e., those who occupy high positions in Paradise).’ Those were the last words of his that I heard.” (Ibn Majah: vol. 1, book 6, no. 1619, emph. added)

Significantly, Muhammad has no guarantee that Allah will forgive him. According to **Q. 33:56** (Sarwar; see also Hilali-Khan), “*the angels seek forgiveness for him*,” and believers likewise are to “*pray for the Prophet*.” That angels seek his forgiveness and believers are supposed to pray for him can only mean that, at least as of now, Muhammad is *not* forgiven. Indeed, in **Q. 46:9** Muhammad himself confessed that he had no assurance of salvation, “*Nor do I know what will be done with me or with you*.” The Hadith confirms this. Muhammad said, “By Allah, though I am Allah’s Messenger, I neither know what will happen to me, nor to you” (al-Bukhari: 7018; see also 1243, 3929).

There is an important implication of the fact that even the Qur’an acknowledges that Jesus alone was

without sin or error: “If Jesus Christ was merely human and still faultless, it follows that God deliberately gave Jesus the power to overcome sin and evil but left the rest of us to wallow in sin. But why would God give only Jesus the power to overcome sin and evil? Does He not want all other human beings to live without sin, or has He not got enough power to make all of us live like Jesus did? If God wants us to live like Jesus, then there must be a fundamental reason why of all who have appeared as humans, only Jesus had the power to live above reproach. So, either God gave Jesus, a mere man the special power to overcome all sin and deliberately left the rest of us to wallow in it, or Jesus Christ was without sin and faultless in the first place because He is fundamentally different from every other human being. The sinlessness of Jesus was the result of His divine nature rather than the result of some preferential treatment by God.” (Sundiata 2006: 201-02)

The fact that Jesus was pure and sinless whereas Muhammad was sinful of necessity also means that “the example of Jesus, introduced in the Qur’an, is perfect and better than the example of Muhammad. This in turn raises two other issues, which are worthy of consideration. Firstly, Jesus as the perfect model would never encourage people to follow any imperfect model. Secondly, Jesus would never let His perfect ministry be followed up by an imperfect ministry, especially when it is uncertain about salvation. Therefore, Muhammad’s claim on calling himself the seal of the prophets contradicts the highest quality the Qur’an has attributed to Jesus amongst all other prophets, including Muhammad himself.” (Shayesteh 2004: 191-92)

F. Jesus, not Muhammad, was protected from the influence of Satan

Q. 3:36 reports that, after giving birth, Mary’s mother said to Allah, “*I have named her Mary, and I commend her and her offspring to Thy protection from the Evil One, the Rejected.*” Muhammad himself confirmed that Jesus is untouched by Satan, unlike every other person (including Muhammad himself). According to the Hadith, “The Prophet said, ‘When any human being is born, Satan touches him at both sides of the body with his two fingers, except Jesus, the son of Mary, whom Satan tried to touch but failed, for he touched the placenta-cover instead.’” (al-Bukhari: 3286; see also 3431; Muslim: 2366a, c)

Nowhere does the Qur’an or the Hadith say that Allah protected Muhammad from the influence of Satan. In fact, a hadith relates that Satan had entered Muhammad: “Anas b. Malik reported that Gabriel came to the Messenger of Allah while he was playing with his playmates. He took hold of him and lay him prostrate on the ground and tore open his breast and took out the heart from it and then extracted a blood-clot out of it and said: That was the part of Satan in thee. And then he washed it with the water of Zamzam in a golden basin and then it was joined together and restored to its place.” (Muslim: 162c, 163; see also al-Tabari 1999: 275-82)

- *The Satanic verses.* The washing with the water of Zamzam did not end Satan’s influence over Muhammad. *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* reports that Satan spoke to Muhammad and caused him to praise three idols worshipped by the Quraysh tribe: “When he [Muhammad] recited [the scripture] Satan cast into his recitation, what is not from the Qur’ān, but which those to whom he [the prophet] had been sent would find pleasing. The Prophet (s) had, during an assembly of the [men of] Quraysh, after reciting the [following verses from] sūrat al-Najm, Have you considered Lāt and ‘Uzzā? And Manāt, the third one? [**Q. 53:19-20**] added, as a result of Satan casting them onto his tongue without his [the Prophet’s] being aware of it, [the following words]: ‘those are the high-flying cranes (al-gharānīq al-‘ulā) and indeed their intercession is to be hoped for’, and so they [the men of Quraysh] were thereby delighted.” (Jalal 2017: Q. 22:52, comment) Those are the so-called “Satanic verses”⁶ Ibn Ishaq (c. 704-767), one of Muhammad’s first Muslim biographers, reported that after Muhammad praised the three idols, he even led the people in bowing down to them: “When he reached His words ‘Have you thought of al-Lat and al-‘Uzza and Manat the third, the other’, Satan, when he was meditating upon it, and desiring to bring it (sc. reconciliation) to his people, put upon his tongue ‘these are the exalted Gharaniq whose intercession is approved.’ When the Quraysh heard that, they were delighted and greatly pleased at the way in which he spoke of their gods and they listened to him; while the believers were holding that what their prophet brought from their Lord was true, not suspecting a mistake or a vain desire or slip, and when he reached the prostration and the end of the Sura in which he prostrated himself the Muslims prostrated themselves when their prophet prostrated confirming what he brought and obeying his command, and the polytheists of Quraysh and others who were in the

⁶ “These were stone idols which the idolaters worshipped and which they claimed interceded for them with God” (Jalal 2017: Q. 53:20, comment). Muhammad later announced that Gabriel told him that those verses had come from Satan, not Allah (Ibid.: Q. 22:52, comment). The “Satanic verses” were then changed to read, “*Have ye seen Lat and Uzza, and another, the third (goddess), Manat? What! for you the male sex, and for Him, the female? Behold, such would be indeed a division most unfair! These are nothing but names which ye have devised,- ye and your fathers,- for which Allah has sent down no authority (whatever).*” This entire incident is discussed by many sources, including Green 2006; Shamoun, “Muhammad and” n.d.; Silas, “Muhammad and” n.d.

mosque prostrated when they heard the mention of their gods, so that everyone in the mosque believer and unbeliever prostrated.” (Ibn Ishaq 1955: 165-66; see also al-Bukhari: 1070, 3972, vol. 6, book 60, no. 385; Muslim: 576 regarding Muhammad and the pagans all prostrating themselves) In other words, Muhammad could not tell the difference between the words of Allah and of Satan.

There is an important implication of the above facts. **Q. 15:42-43** says, “*For over My servants no authority shalt thou [Iblis; Satan] have, except such as put themselves in the wrong and follow thee. And verily, Hell is the promised abode for them all!*” (see also **Q. 16:98-100; 22:53; 38:82-83**) Given the fact that Muhammad could not tell the difference between Satan’s words and Allah’s, Muhammad cannot have been a sincere servant purified by God’s grace or a true prophet of God.

- *Muhammad admitted he was cursed.* Muhammad’s own wife Aisha revealed that Muhammad was not protected from Satan. Aisha narrated, “Once the Prophet was bewitched so that he began to imagine that he had done a thing which in fact he had not done” (al-Bukhari: 3175; see also 3268, 6391). Indeed, Muhammad’s being under the spell of Satan, or magic, or delusions, or madness, was so severe that he even imagined he had slept with his wives when he had not! Aisha again testified, “The Prophet continued for such-and-such period imagining that he has slept (had sexual relations) with his wives, and in fact he did not” (al-Bukhari: 6063). In that same hadith, two observers concluded that Muhammad was “under the effect of magic” (the magical object being “the skin of the pollen of a male date tree with a comb and the hair stuck to it, kept under a stone in the well of Dharwan”); Muhammad himself concluded, “Allah has cursed me” (Ibid.). The pagans who saw and heard him concluded that Muhammad was mad or possessed by demons (**Q. 23:70; 25:8; 37:36; 44:14; 68:51**).

- *The nature of Muhammad’s death.* **Q. 69:44-47** (Hilali-Khan) says, “*And if he (Muhammad SAW) had forged a false saying concerning Us (Allah swt), We surely should have seized him by his right hand (or with power and might), and then certainly should have cut off his life artery (Aorta), and none of you could withhold Us from (punishing) him.*” The Hadith reports, “When Khaibar was conquered, a (cooked) sheep containing poison, was given as a present to Allah’s Apostle” (al-Bukhari: 4249; see also 2617; Muslim: 2190a; Abi Dawud: 4509). Another hadith then recounts, “Narrated Aisha: The Prophet in his ailment in which he died, used to say, ‘O Aisha! I still feel the pain caused by the food I ate at Khaibar, and at this time, I feel as if *my aorta is being cut* from that poison’” (al-Bukhari: 4428, emph. added). The fact that **Q. 69:44-47** mentions a particular form of death (cutting the aorta) that will happen to Muhammad if he should be a false prophet (i.e., speak falsely concerning Allah), and then Muhammad died specifically using the very words of **Q. 69:46**, cannot be coincidental but confirms that his death is the fulfillment of those ayat.

G. Jesus, not Muhammad, has the special blessing and honor of Allah in this world and the next

Q. 3:45 says, “*Behold! the angels said: ‘O Mary! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a Word from Him: his name will be Christ Jesus, the son of Mary, held in honour in this world and the Hereafter and of (the company of) those nearest to Allah.*’” Ghabril comments on this verse that “from a study of the Qur’an one learns that no one has been described as being eminent in this world and the next other than Christ (Isa), and none of the prophets and apostles enjoyed this distinction except him” (Ghabril 2003: 35). Christ’s special distinction is confirmed in **Q. 19:31** where Jesus is quoted as saying that Allah “*has made me blessed wherever I may be.*” Lester Fleenor states, “Sura 19:31 mentions that Christ was blessed wherever He was, meaning that God agreed upon His every action and word, every moment in His life. God would never bless anybody in every circumstance unless *all* his life was pure and sinless.” (Fleenor 2005: 61) **Q. 19:33** quotes Jesus as saying, “*Peace is on me the day I was born, the day that I die, and the day that I shall be raised up to life (again).*” Muslim apologist Ahmed Deedat admits that “there is not a single disparaging remark in the entire Quran” concerning Jesus (Deedat 2002: 5).

On the other hand, as discussed above, Muhammad is censured by Allah in the Qur’an. Further, unlike Allah’s guarantee that Jesus will be held in honor in the hereafter, Muhammad had no assurance that he would even make it to paradise (**Q. 46:9**; al-Bukhari: 7018; see also 1243, 3929).

H. Jesus, not Muhammad, is a “Sign” for all people of the world

The Qur’an describes Jesus himself as “a Sign” to all the people of the world: “*He said: ‘So (it will be): Thy Lord saith, “that is easy for Me: and (We wish) to appoint him as a Sign unto men and a Mercy from Us”’*” (**Q. 19:21**). **Q. 43:61** adds, “*And (Jesus) shall be a Sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgment).*” **Q. 21:91** similarly says, “*We made her [Mary] and her son [Jesus] a sign for all peoples*” (see also **Q.23:50**). Significantly, **Q. 7:36** states, “*But those who reject Our signs and treat them with arrogance,- they are companions of the Fire, to dwell therein (for ever)*” (see also **Q. 3:4** which threatens retribution against those

who “reject faith” or “disbelieve” in God’s signs).

On the other hand, Muhammad is not described as a sign; rather, the Qur’an repeatedly describes him as only a messenger or warner (e.g., **Q. 3:144; 7:188; 11:2, 12; 17:93, 105; 22:49; 24:54; 25:56; 27:92; 29:50; 34:28; 42:7; 46:9; 79:45; 88:21**).

I. Jesus, not Muhammad, performed miraculous signs

The Qur’an states that Jesus was able to work miracles, including speaking as a newborn (**Q. 19:29-34; 5:110**), creating life (**Q. 3:49; 5:110**), healing people (**Q. 3:49; 5:110**), and raising the dead (**Q. 3:49; 5:110**); see also **Q. 2:253; 3:45-49; 43:63; 61:6**.

The Qur’an indicates that only Allah is able to create life (**Q. 7:158; 9:116; 10:34, 56; 15:23; 22:73; 23:80; 67:2**). Although Ali translates **Q. 5:110** as Jesus “makest” the bird out of clay (Hilali-Khan say “design”), the word is “*akhluqu*” which means “create” (as Sarwar and Arberry properly translate **Q. 3:49**). Everywhere else in the Qur’an the word and its derivations are translated as “create,” including specifically when Allah “creates” something (e.g., **Q. 2:29; 3:47; 5:17; 7:19; 14:32; 16:17, 48; 17:99; 22:73; 24:45; 28:68; 30:54; 51:56**). Jesus even “*breathes into it*” (the clay bird he created) the breath of life (**Q. 3:49; 5:110**). That is exactly what Allah does in giving life (**Q. 15:29; 21:91; 32:9; 38:72; 66:12**).

Q. 10:34 says, “Say: ‘Of your “partners,” can any originate creation and repeat it?’ Say: ‘It is Allah Who originates creation and repeats it: then how are ye deluded away (from the truth)?’” Ali says concerning this verse, “The false gods can neither create out of nothing nor sustain the creative energy which maintains the world” (Ali 2006: Q. 10:34n.1428). Since Jesus *did* create life, he must not be a false god but must himself be divine. That also means, according to **Q. 10:34**, that Jesus is *not* a “partner” with God (as Muslims allege Christians make him to be), but is God himself.⁷

⁷ Muslim apologists are quick to point out, “Note how the words ‘by My leave’ are repeated with each miracle to emphasize the fact that they arose, not out of the power or will of Jesus, but by the leave and will and power of Allah, who is supreme over Jesus as He is over all other mortals” (Ali 2006: Q. 5:110n.820). There are two answers to this. First, former Muslim Daniel Shayesteh points out, “The breath that Jesus breathed into the clay bird had the same power and characteristics as the breath of God in creation. If Jesus is not divine, how can His breath act in the same way as does the divine breath? Did this breath come out from inside of Jesus? Was that because God had made His dwelling inside of Jesus? Doesn’t the breath of creation belong only to God? . . . A bird that could become a testimony to the life giving breath that came out of Jesus. Because of these verses and many others, the fact that the Qur’an denies the divinity of Jesus is something that brings the consistency of the Qur’an’s theology into question.” (Shayesteh 2004: 141)

The second answer is that the Muslim position fundamentally misunderstands the biblical depiction of Jesus Christ and how he acted while he was on earth. Jesus was, indeed, fully human. But he was more than simply a mortal human being: he also was the divine Son of God. R. C. Sproul summarizes that “in the Trinity all members are equal in nature, in honor, and in glory. All three members are eternal, self-existent; they partake of all aspects and attributes of deity. In God’s plan of redemption, however, the Son *voluntarily* takes on a subordinate role to the Father [see **Phil 2:5-11**]. . . By submitting Himself to the perfect will of His Father, Jesus did for us what we were unwilling and unable to do for ourselves. He obeyed the law of God perfectly. . . . By obeying the law perfectly, Jesus accomplished two vitally important things. On the one hand He was qualified to be our Redeemer, the Lamb without blemish. Had Jesus sinned, He could not have atoned for His own sins, let alone for ours. Second, by His perfect obedience He earned the rewards God promised to all who keep His covenant. He merited the rewards of heaven that He bestows upon us. As the subordinate One, He saved a people who had been insubordinate.” (Sproul 1992: 79-80)

This voluntary divesting or emptying himself of his position and privileges as God and becoming a man is known as Christ’s *kenōsis* (**Phil 2:7**; Zodiates 1992: *kenōō*, 857-58). Consequently, “*as a man*, he wrought his miracles, not by virtue of his Deity, which was ever inherent in him, but by virtue of a perfect faith in the power of the Father, through the plenitude of the Holy Ghost” (Bickersteth 1957: 99n.*, *emph. in orig.*). That is the context in which Christ repeatedly stated that he did nothing on his own initiative but only did what the Father had him do (**John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10**). In other words, there was perfect unity, communication, and harmony between the Father and the Son. That is not contrary to the doctrine of the Trinity but confirms it. Indeed, so complete was the identification of Jesus with the Father that in the same speech in which he said “*I did not speak on my own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak*” (**John 12:49**), Jesus also said, “*He who believes in Me does not believe in Me but in Him who sent Me. He who sees Me sees the One who sent Me*” (**John 12:44-45**). As al-Masih summarizes concerning **Q. 5:110**, “The Quran testifies repeatedly to the perfect cooperation among Allah, the Christ and the Holy Spirit. The three cooperated in a complete unity, performing the miracles of Christ together. Christians, too, believe in the cooperative action of the holy Trinity.” (al-Masih 1993: 22) That is exactly the picture of Jesus’ unity and perfect cooperation with the Father described in the Bible and stated by Jesus himself in **John 12:44-45**. D. A. Carson concludes, “The peculiar subordination of the Son to the Father is precisely what guarantees that all that the Son does is what the Father wants him to do, indeed, what the Father does. . . . Thus faith in Jesus (v. 44) is not faith in a merely human

In contrast to Jesus, the Qur'an records that Muhammad was challenged to perform miracles but replied that he did not have that ability, let alone the ability to perform signs that only God can perform (**Q. 2:118-19; 3:183-84; 6:37, 109; 10:20; 13:7, 27; 17:59, 90-93; 20:133; 21:5; 28:48; 29:50; 30:58; 34:28; 43:40**). In fact, according to the Qur'an, the only "sign" that Muhammad was given was *the Qur'an itself* (**Q. 2:118-19; 20:133**).⁸

J. Jesus, not Muhammad, has supernatural knowledge

The Qur'an says, "*Only You [Allah] are the All-Knower of all that is hidden (or unseen, etc.)*" (**Q. 5:109**, Hilali-Khan) and "*with Him [Allah] are the keys of the unseen, the treasures that none knoweth but He*" (**Q. 6:59**; see also **34:2-3**). Islamic scholar and author Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi states, "*Al-Ghayb* means 'unseen' or 'hidden' things. *Ilmu 'l ghayb* means knowledge of the things which are hidden at present, like the events of the future. Such knowledge is the sole prerogative of Allah. Nobody can know the *ghayb* except Allah." (Rizvi 1992: 37) At the end of **Q. 3:49** Jesus is quoted as saying, "*I declare to you what ye eat, and what ye store in your houses. Surely therein is a Sign for you if ye did believe.*" *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* comments on this, "I will inform you too of what things you eat, and what you treasure up, store, in your houses, and what I have never seen, and he would inform people what they had eaten and what they would eat" (Jalal 2017: Q. 3:49, comment; see also Ibn Kathir, *Stories*, n.d.: 178 [Even as a boy Jesus "could tell his friends what kind of supper waited for them at home and what they had hidden and where"]). In other words, Jesus has supernatural knowledge of things or events he had not observed. Qushairi states, "These were His [Jesus'] outward signs and dazzling, overpowering proofs: bringing life to the dead, healing the blind and the leper, *telling what they did secretly*, and other miracles" (Al Qushairi 2002-2014: Q. 3:49, comment, *emph. added*) The *Kashani Tafsir* adds, "And I will inform you too of what things you eat, [of what things] you partake in your pursuit of lusts and pleasures, and what you treasure up in your houses, that is, in the houses of your unseens [sic.] in the way of motives and intentions. Surely in that is a sign for you, if you are believers." (al-Kashani 2002-19: Q. 3:49, comment) This confirms that Jesus knows even the motives and intentions of people's hearts and minds!

Masih summarizes, "There is hardly a greater proof or better admission on the part of Muhammad for the deity of Christ than this one. He confessed that Christ knows the hidden truth and can read the secrets of the hearts of men. He knows all your secrecies in detail. He will manifest your deeds whether good or evil, for He is the All-knowing. No one can hide anything from Him." (al-Masih 1993: 26) Since no one knows the unseen except God (see **Q. 2:33; 3:5; 6:59; 9:94, 105; 10:20; 11:5; 13:9; 16:19, 23; 20:7; 21:110; 23:92; 24:29; 27:65; 31:34; 64:18**), but Jesus knows the unseen, then of necessity Jesus must be divine (i.e., God come to

agent, one more prophet, but faith in God mediated by God's supreme self-disclosure, the Word incarnate, the God/man, his unique Son—or else it is not faith at all. And so closely is the Son, the Word, identified with the Father (1:1, 18), that to see Jesus is to see the Father who sent him (*cf.* 14:9)." (Carson 1991: 451-52)

⁸ Despite Muhammad's own statements in the Qur'an and the Hadith that he was not able to perform miracles, later tradition attributes miracles to him (perhaps in an effort to elevate him to Jesus' stature). These alleged miracles include: miraculous healings (al-Bukhari: 2942, 3701, 4210); miraculous increase in food or drink (al-Bukhari: 4102; Muslim: 1807a); water springing from between his fingers (al-Bukhari: 169, 200, 3576, 4152; at-Tirmidhi: vol. 1, book 46, no. 3631, 3633; an-Nasa'i: vol. 1, book 1, no. 76, 77); and splitting the moon into two parts (al-Bukhari: 3636, 3637, 3868, 3870; Muslim: 2800b; at-Tirmidhi: 2182, vol. 1, book 44, no. 3289). Abdul-Mohsin 2006: 181-83, 190-92, al-Athari 2005: 106-07, and Parshall 1994: 51-59 list these and similar alleged miracles.

The "splitting of the moon" is based on **Q. 54:1-2** ("*The Hour (of Judgment) is nigh, and the moon is cleft asunder*"). Abdel Haleem points out "Some traditional commentators hold the view that this describes an actual event at the time of the Prophet, but it clearly refers to the end of the world" (Haleem 2005: Q. 54:1n.a; see also Ali 2006: Q. 54:1n.5128). In commenting on *Sahih al-Bukhari*: 3868 ("The people of Mecca asked Allah's Messenger to show them a miracle. So he showed them the moon split in two halves between which they saw the Hira' mountain") and **Q. 54:1** (*Sahih*, "*The Hour has come near, and the moon has split [in two]*"), the Muslim website Quran-Islam.org observes that "the words [in two] are not found in the Arabic Quran. It is obvious that they were added by the translator in order to make the Quranic words in harmony with the hadith! This hadith is an example of many others which present clear contradictions to the Quranic truth. What is more serious is that all who believe such a hadith when the Quranic truth is shown to them are the ones who insist on disbelieving the Quran." ("Did prophet Muhammad split the moon?" 2001-2019: n.p.) The "clear contradictions to the Quranic truth" includes all traditions and claims that Muhammad performed any miracles at all, since the Qur'an affirms that he did not. Mawdudi in his commentary acknowledges that Jesus was able to perform "such miracles as had not been granted to anyone before him nor to anyone after him [which includes Muhammad]" (A'la Mawdudi n.d.: Q. 43:59n.53). "Had Muhammad been a miracle-worker, indeed had all the fanciful legends of his miracles in his childhood in the tradition literature been true, it would have been a simple matter to respond to such challenges. Yet throughout the Qur'an, whenever the question of whether he could emulate the signs of the prophets before him arises, the answer is always in the form of a denial." (Gilchrist 1994: 134)

earth as a man).

On the other hand, Muhammad admitted, “*I tell you not that with me are the treasures of Allah, nor do I know what is hidden*” (Q. 6:50). In Q. 10:20 Muhammad explicitly places himself in the same condition as unbelievers who wanted to know the unseen, “*And they say: Why is not a sign sent to him from his Lord? Say: The unseen is only for Allah; therefore wait-surely I too, with you am of those who wait.*” (Shakir)

K. Jesus, not Muhammad, taught with divine authority

Q. 3:50 quotes Jesus as saying, “*(I have come to you), to attest the Law which was before me. And to make lawful to you part of what was (Before) forbidden to you; I have come to you with a Sign from your Lord. So fear Allah, and obey me.*” Ibn Kathir comments, “This part of the Ayah indicates that ‘Isa abrogated some of the Laws of the Tawrah and informed the Jews of the truth regarding some issues that they used to dispute about” (Ibn Kathir 2003: Q. 3:50, comment; see also Al Qushairi 2002-2014: Q. 3:49, comment). This is significant inasmuch as Allah says “*We abrogate*” our revelations (Q. 2:106). In other words, Jesus did not just confirm the law (Torah) but had authority *over* the law. Since the law was God’s law, only God has authority over his own law. Only God has authority to “abrogate” his own law. By doing what only God could do, Jesus was asserting that he was, indeed, God come to earth as a man.

Given the divine authority with which Jesus taught, Jesus had said in Q. 3:50 “*so fear Allah and obey me.*” He says the same thing in Q. 43:63 (“*When Jesus came with Clear Signs, he said: ‘Now have I come to you with Wisdom, and in order to make clear to you some of the (points) on which ye dispute: therefore fear Allah and obey me*”). In fact, in Q. 3:52 Jesus’ disciples are called true Muslims. Allah himself then picks up on this in Q. 3:55 and says, “*I will make those who follow thee [Jesus] superior to those who reject faith, to the Day of Resurrection*” Yusuf Ali points out, “Those who follow thee refer to both Muslims (insofar as they truly follow the basic teachings of Jesus) and Christians (who claim to follow him)” (Ali 2006: Q. 3:55n.396). In light of these passages, the article “True Islam from a Christian perspective” states “Everyone who wants to submit to God follows the word of the Torah, the Prophets and the words of Jesus confirming the Torah. A true Muslim desires to get to know the whole revelation of God. Therefore he cannot ignore the Torah, the Prophets and the Gospel. A true Muslim will obey the words of Jesus.” (“True Islam” 2014: Who teaches us true Islam? citing Q. 5:44, 46-47; 43:63)

The divine authority of Jesus contrasts with Muhammad, who specifically said in Q. 46:9, “*I am not something original among the messengers*” (Sahih) or, as Ali translates it, “*I am no bringer of new-fangled doctrine among the messengers.*” He was even told to consult with the people of the Book (i.e., Christians and Jews) so that he could understand the meaning of the revelations to him (see Q. 10:94; 21:7; see also 3:93; 16:43). Muhammad claimed only to confirm what had been revealed before (Q. 41:43; see also 6:90).

L. Jesus, not Muhammad, was raised to heaven alive where he still is

Q. 4:158 says, “*Allah raised him [Jesus] up unto Himself*” (see also Q. 3:55). In saying that Allah raised Jesus up to *Himself*, the Qur’an is confirming that Jesus “returned to the very throne of God whence he had come” (Gilchrist 2015: 91). In other words, Jesus “did not ascend to the lower heavenly realms – he returned to the presence of *his Father* above the heavens and sat down at the right hand side of the throne of God himself” (Ibid.). This means that Jesus is the way to heaven since he is there. As we have seen, Muhammad does not know whether he will even make it to heaven someday in the future (Q. 46:9; al-Bukhari: 7018; see also 1243, 3929). This also means that Jesus is alive today, 2000 years after he walked this earth. On the other hand, Muhammad died and was buried in Medina. Only his grave is with us today. Since Jesus is alive and Muhammad is dead, even according to the Qur’an, Jesus is greater than Muhammad.

M. Jesus, not Muhammad, is coming again to the earth to judge and rule

Q. 43:61 says, “*And (Jesus) shall be a Sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgment): therefore have no doubt about the (Hour), but follow ye Me: this is a Straight Way.*” Hilali-Khan translates it this way: “*And he [‘Iesa (Jesus), son of Maryam (Mary)] shall be a known sign for (the coming of) the Hour (Day of Resurrection) [i.e. ‘Iesa’s (Jesus) descent on the earth]. Therefore have no doubt concerning it (i.e. the Day of Resurrection).*” In the Hadith, Muhammad affirmed that Jesus will return to the earth: “Allah’s Messenger said, ‘By Him in Whose Hands my soul is, surely (Jesus) the son of Mary will soon descend amongst you and will judge mankind justly (as a Just Ruler)’” (al-Bukhari: 3448; see also 2222, 2476). This is in accord with the biblical teaching that Jesus will judge humanity (e.g., Matt 25:31-46; John 5:22; Acts 10:42; 17:31; Rom 2:16; 2 Cor 5:10; Rev 19:11). Karim’s commentary on the *Mishkat ul-Masabih* says that the second advent of Christ is “an Ijma [i.e., agreement of the Muslim community on religious issues] which is binding upon the Muslims” (Karim 1939:

4:79).

When he returns, Jesus' just rule will be universal. Again, Jesus is exercising the attributes of divinity, because as **Q. 6:57** says, "*He [Allah] declares the truth, and He is the best of judges.*" Jesus alone can "judge justly" and is the "Just Ruler" because just as Allah "*declares the truth, and He is the best of judges,*" so Jesus is "the Word" and "the Spirit" from God. Jesus alone is the Just Judge and Ruler because unlike Muhammad, he alone is "the Messiah," is without any sin, and is perfectly "holy" (**Q. 19:19**). Jesus alone is the Just Judge and Ruler because he alone is untouched by Satan (al-Bukhari: 3286) and therefore is "a pure, impeccable soul . . . an embodiment of truth, veracity, righteousness, and excellence" (A'la Mawdudi n.d.: Q. 4:171n.213). Jesus alone is a Just Ruler because he knows the unseen, even people's "motives and intentions" (al-Kashani 2002-19: Q. 3:49, comment). According to the Qur'an, Muhammad has none of those attributes. Muhammad is dead and, according to the Qur'an, unlike Jesus he will not return to "judge mankind justly." Instead, he admitted that he did not know what would happen to him after death (Q. 46:9; al-Bukhari: 7018), was fearful of the hour of judgment and the "punishment of the grave" (al-Bukhari: 1059; 1372), and was begging Allah to forgive him even on his death bed: Muhammad knew he would be judged.

N. Conclusion

There is no one like Jesus according to the Qur'an itself, not even Muhammad. As one writer put it when considering all of the attributes that the Qur'an states about Jesus, "Does all this not raise the intrinsic question on just how 'human' a person can be who unites all the above attributes in himself or herself? Do we know of any person who could boast of calling just two of these attributes his or her own? In the case of Jesus, one can only conclude that He is superhuman. And that is divine!" (Nehls 2011: 53)

IX. The Character of Muhammad

Q. 33:21 says, "*Ye have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the Praise of Allah.*" Muslim professor Abdul-Mohsin lists Muhammad's "conduct and morals" as evidence of his prophethood. Abdul-Mohsin says, "Never before the advent of Muhammad was moral perfection used as evidence of prophethood" and "the Prophet's moral perfection was the strongest evidence that obliged many people to believe in Muhammad" (Abdul-Mohsin 2006: 213, 214). Emerick says that Muhammad is "considered by Muslims to be the best model of a husband, father, leader, friend, guide, and politician" (Emerick 2004: 131). Abdul-Mohsin calls him "a form of human perfection" and "the ideal and perfect example for all mankind" (Abdul-Mohsin 2006: 56-57).

The Qur'an and the Hadith actually reveal a considerably different character than Abdul-Mohsin and Emerick's assessment. While he was in Mecca, Muhammad faced opposition and, indeed, did not respond with hatred and violence; at that time he did not order his followers (who were relatively few in number) to fight or wage war, since he considered himself simply a "warner" sent by Allah (**Q. 2:119; 14:4; 42:7; 43:3; 46:12**). He was happily married to one wife, Khadijah. Because Khadijah was wealthy, he was content materially (Ibn Abbas 2016: Q. 93:8, comment). He lived simply, a pattern he, to a large degree, continued throughout his life (Gilchrist 1994: 57-58; Parshall 1994: 43-44). However, the situation changed after he moved to Medina in 622. After that time Muhammad became a warrior-prophet-ruler in absolute control of a religion and a state. His true character thereby was revealed. This is so because he now had the power to command and obtain anything he wanted—and what he wanted and the lengths he went to get it expose what was really in his heart.

Since Muhammad is the central role model for Muslims, it is important to assess his character—as revealed by important aspects of his life—in comparison with the character of Jesus Christ. This is especially true since Muhammad compared himself to Jesus Christ: "I am most akin to Jesus Christ among the whole of mankind" (Muslim: 2365b; see also 2365a, c; al-Bukhari: 3442, 3443).

A. Muhammad and money

In **Q. 6:90** Muhammad had been commanded to follow the example of the other prophets and ask for no money for his messages: "*Those were the (prophets) who received Allah's guidance: Copy the guidance they received; Say: 'No reward for this do I ask of you: This is no less than a message for the nations'*" The following ayat apply this principle to Muhammad: **Q. 12:104; 25:57; 42:23; 52:40; 68:46**; Noah: **Q. 10:71-72; 11:29; 26:109**; Salih: **Q. 26:145**; Lot: **Q. 26:164**; Shu'ayb: **Q. 26: 180**; Hud: **Q.26:124-27**; Other Messengers: **Q. 36:20-21**. Despite this command from Allah (which is consistent with the lifestyles of biblical prophets), Muhammad's desire for wealth is clearly revealed in the Qur'an and the Hadith. Two incidents reveal Muhammad's character concerning his desire for wealth and his looking down on the poor. In **Q. 7:188** Muhammad says, "*If I had knowledge of the unseen, I should have multiplied all good, and no evil should have*

touched me.” Muhammad was saying that if he *did* have knowledge of the unseen he would use that knowledge to “*have abundant good things and no harm could touch me.*” In other words, his attitude was self-centered and was all about blessing himself with good things and avoiding harm to himself rather than blessing and protecting others. In another incident, Muhammad “ignore[ed] the questioning of a blind man interested in Islam, due to his preoccupation in attempting to persuade a person of substance and influence into Islam” (Dirks 2008: 187). In favoring the rich over the poor, Muhammad revealed his real heart.

When Muhammad became a man of war he was able to act on his desire for money and gain. **Q. 8:1** (Hilali-Khan) says, “*They ask you (O Muhammad SAW) about the spoils of war. Say: ‘The spoils are for Allah and the Messenger’*” (see also **Q. 59:7**). **Q. 8:41** commands Muhammad’s men to give him one-fifth of the spoils they take in battle. In addition to the one-fifth of the spoils of battle, Muhammad also received a “special portion” of spoils called “*safi*,” as this hadith narrates: “The Prophet had a special portion in the booty called safi. This would be a slave if he desired or a slave girl if he desired or a horse if he desired. He would choose it before taking out the fifth.” (Abi Dawud: 2991) Muhammad got his “special portion” in addition to the one-fifth share of the plunder even if he did not participate in the battle himself (Abi Dawud: 2992-93). In one case, one of Muhammad’s fighters, Dihyat Al Kalbi, received a slave girl as part of his share of the spoil; however, “When he [Muhammad] looked at her, he said to him ‘take another slave girl from the captives.’ The Prophet then set her free and married her.” (Abi Dawud: 2998; see also 2996-97; al-Bukhari: 947, 2228)

In addition to one-fifth of the plunder and his “special portion” (including any woman he fancied, even if she was someone else’s), Muhammad received considerable amounts of real estate (Abi Dawud: 2967). As a result, the Qur’an says that Allah “*found you [Muhammad] poor, and made you rich (self-sufficient with self-contentment, etc.)*” (**Q. 93:8**, Hilali-Khan; see also al-Bukhari: 2298 [“Allah made the Prophet wealthy through conquests”]). “A Muslim may argue that Muhammad used his wealth to help those in need and that he himself didn’t live lavishly. This is beside the point, since the issue at hand is that Muhammad became quite wealthy as a result of Allah commanding Muslims to give his prophet a sizeable part of their spoils, even though the Quran says that prophets are to receive no wages or reward from the people!” (Shamoun and Katz, “The Profit” n.d.: n.p.)

B. Muhammad and women

1. Women in Islam. **Q. 4:1** speaks of the oneness of the origin of men and women (the Lord “*created you from a single person, created, of like nature, His mate*”). **Q. 3:195** indicates equality in rewards for men and women (“*Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female*”; see also **Q. 16:97**). Nevertheless, men and women (particularly wives) are *not* regarded as having equal worth as human beings in the Qur’an: “*Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other*” (**Q. 4:34**, Sahih); “*they (women) have rights similar to those (of men) over them in kindness, and men are a degree above them*” (**Q. 2:228**, Pickthall). Ibn Kathir comments on this verse, “Men are in a more advantageous position than women physically as well as in their mannerism, status, obedience (of women to them), spending, taking care of the affairs and in general, in this life *and in the Hereafter*” (Ibn Kathir 2003: Q. 2:228, comment, *emph. added*).

Because of their superior position, husbands are permitted by the Qur’an to beat their wives (wives do not have a right to beat their husbands): “*And those you fear may be rebellious admonish; banish them to their couches, and beat them,*” **Q. 4:34** (Arberry).⁹ Additionally, males receive double the inheritance of females (**Q.**

⁹ Some Muslim apologists try to downplay the fact that the Qur’an authorizes wife-beating. Yahiya Emerick cites an example of Muhammad’s holding up his toothbrush when asked what a husband should use to slap his wife with (Emerick 2004: 160). Ali and Hilali-Khan even add the word “lightly” in parentheses after the words “beat them” in **Q. 4:34**, even though the “Arabic doesn’t say to beat them lightly, it just says to beat them” (Spencer 2009: 20). Further, the context indicates that “beating comes as the last corrective measure when sexual desertion fails. Light beating after sexual desertion is an anticlimax that serves no purpose. . . . The beating must be stronger than sexual desertion to have any effect.” (Newton and Haqq 2006: 13)

Muhammad did not insist that wife-beating follow carefully prescribed rules or be “light.” The Hadith reports that “The Prophet said: A man will not be asked as to why he beat his wife” (Abi Dawud: 2147; see also Ibn Majah: vol. 3, book 9, no. 1986). In one hadith, Aisha (Muhammad’s favorite wife) reported that Muhammad left her one night after he thought she was asleep. She got up and followed him. When he returned “he gave me a shove in the chest that hurt me” (an-Nasa’i: 3964; see also 3963). In another hadith, “Habibah daughter of Sahl was the wife of Thabit ibn Qays Shimmas. He beat her and broke some of her part. So she came to the Prophet after morning, and complained to him against her husband. The Prophet called on Thabit ibn Qays and said (to him): Take a part of her property and separate yourself from her. He asked: Is that right, Messenger of Allah? He said: Yes. He said: I have given her two gardens of mine as a dower, and they are already in her possession. The Prophet said: Take them and separate yourself from her.” (Abi Dawud: 2228; see also 2227) Note that this wife had been beaten so severely that she had broken bones, yet Muhammad never admonished or

4:11, 12, 176); one male witness in court is the equivalent of two females (**Q. 2:282**); women, but not men, are required to cover everything except their face and hands in public (**Q. 24:31**; see Jalal 2017: Q. 24:31, comment); men, but not women, may marry more than one spouse (**Q. 4:3**) and may marry and have sex with pre-pubescent girls (**Q. 65:4**); and wives are considered, essentially, the property of the husband: “*Your wives are as fields for you. You may enter your fields from any place you want*” (**Q. 2:223**, Sarwar).

In the Hadith, Muhammad expressed similar views concerning his low regard for women, including:

- *Women are inherently evil and crooked.* “I heard the Prophet saying, ‘Evil omen is in three things: The horse, the woman and the house’” (al-Bukhari: 2858; see also 110, 2859, 5093, 5094; Abi Dawud: 3921); and “Woman is like a rib. When you attempt to straighten it, you would break it. And if you leave her alone you would benefit by her, and crookedness will remain in her.” (Muslim: 7151; see also 1467a, b, 1468a; al-Bukhari: 5184; see also 3331, 5184, 5185, 5186);
- *Women are defective in intelligence and religion.* In a conversation with some women, Muhammad said, “‘You curse frequently and are ungrateful to your husbands. I have not seen anyone more deficient in intelligence and religion than you. A cautious sensible man could be led astray by some of you.’ The women asked, ‘O Allah’s Messenger! What is deficient in our intelligence and religion?’ He said, ‘Is not the evidence of two women equal to the witness of one man?’ They replied in the affirmative. He said, ‘This is the deficiency in her intelligence. Isn’t it true that a woman can neither pray nor fast during her menses?’ The women replied in the affirmative. He said, ‘This is the deficiency in her religion.’” (al-Bukhari: 304; see also 1462, 5196);
- *Women annul men’s prayers and are equivalent to donkeys and dogs.* “Narrated Aisha: The things which annul prayer were mentioned before me (and those were): a dog, a donkey and a woman. I said, ‘You have compared us (women) to donkeys and dogs.’” (al-Bukhari: 514; see also 511; Ibn Majah: vol. 1, book 5, no. 949, 950, 951)
- *A woman cannot be alone with a man or travel except when accompanied by a man.* “Narrated Ibn Abbas: that he heard the Prophet saying, ‘It is not permissible for a man to be alone with a woman, and no lady should travel except with a Muhram (i.e. her husband or a person whom she cannot marry in any case for ever; e.g. her father, brother, etc.).’” (al-Bukhari: 3006; see also Muslim: 1341c)
- *A woman’s duty to her husband is primary even over her duty to Allah.* “Abdullah bin Abu Awfa said ‘When Muadh bin Jabal came from Sham, he prostrated to the Prophet who said: “What is this, O Muadh?” He said: “I went to Sham and saw them prostrating to their bishops and patricians and I wanted to do that for you.” The messenger of Allah said: “Do not do that. If I were to command anyone to prostrate to anyone other than Allah, I would have commanded women to prostrate to their husbands. By the One in Whose Hand is the soul of Muhammad! No woman can fulfill her duty towards Allah until she fulfills her duty towards her husband. If he asks her (for intimacy) even if she is on her camel saddle, she should not refuse.”’ (Ibn Majah: vol. 3, book 9, no. 1853; see also 1852; Abi Dawud: 2140; al-Bukhari: 814)
- *The majority of those in hell will be women.* “Then I stood at the gate of the Fire and saw that the majority of those who entered it were women” (al-Bukhari: 5196; see also 304).

2. Muhammad and his wives. The above attitudes toward women were exemplified in Muhammad’s own relationships with his wives. Shortly before Muhammad moved to Medina, his wife of 25 years, Khadijah, died. After her death, Muhammad revealed his true character regarding women. **Q. 4:3** permits a man to marry up to four women but only if he treats them all justly (or, as the *Islamic Bulletin* puts it, “only on condition that the husband is scrupulously fair” [“Can a Muslim” n.d.: n.p.]). Those rules did not apply to Muhammad (**Q. 33:50-57**). Thus, following Khadijah’s death, “Muhammad married as many women as he wanted and interned many more in his harem as concubines. The number of his wives varies from nine to thirteen, and many of them had no choice in the matter—for by ‘divine revelation,’ any woman he fancied he also got.” (Sundiata 2006: 363) But while Muhammad could do essentially as he wished with women, his wives were not permitted to remarry after his death (**Q. 33:53**).

Muhammad’s favorite wife was Aisha. As Aisha relates, “The Messenger of Allah married me when I

even questioned the man who had beaten her. To compound the injury to the woman, Muhammad ordered her to give back the dowry she had received, which means that, even though she was the one who was complaining against her husband, she had to endure a savage beating and then give up her property; the husband lost nothing and now had the means to purchase a new wife! Similarly, al-Bukhari: 5825 reports that a man had beaten his wife severely enough that the skin of face had a green mark: “the lady (came), wearing a green veil (and complained to [Aisha] of her husband and showed her a green spot on her skin caused by beating). It was the habit of ladies to support each other, so when Allah’s Messenger came, Aisha said, ‘I have not seen any woman suffering as much as the believing women. Look! Her skin is greener than her clothes!’”—yet Muhammad did not condemn the husband for beating the wife on her face.

was six, and consummated the marriage with me when I was nine, and I used to play with dolls” (an-Nasa’i: 3378; see also 3255; al-Bukhari: 3896, 5133, 5134, 5158; Muslim: 1422b, d; Abi Dawud: 2121). She also related that she had been “playing in a swing with some of my girl friends” when her mother took her to Muhammad to consummate their marriage (al-Bukhari: 3894; see also Abi Dawud: 4935).

Sundiata observes: “Muhammad was the one ‘prophet’ who had everything tailor-made to fit his every whim—at the expense of other believers if necessary. Allah made all the arrangements so that Muhammad would have no difficulties with whatever took his fancy. Muhammad’s Allah is the kind of god that human beings have always invented; a god who does only what pleases us; a god who is prepared to change his decrees to accommodate our wishes; a god who is there to do our bidding after he consults us; a god who is for us but against our enemies; a god who shows mercy to us but justice to everyone else; a spineless god without a will.” (Sundiata 2006: 367)

Muhammad’s refusal to treat his wives equally resulted in their being split into two rival groups. Their hurt at being treated unequally led some of the wives to appeal to him on more than one occasion to treat them all fairly—but he refused, as *Sahih al-Bukhari* reports in a lengthy hadith (al-Bukhari: 2581; see also 2580). Jealousies and rivalries are inherent in polygamy because it is impossible to love and treat several wives equally (as **Q. 4:3** requires). That was exacerbated in Muhammad’s case because, per **Q. 33:51**, he did *not* have to be “scrupulously fair” to his wives and wasn’t. **Q. 66:3-4** and the Hadith (al-Bukhari: 6691; vol. 6, book 60, no. 435) reveal other jealousies and conspiracies among Muhammad’s wives and their arguments and tensions with him. Indeed, at one point the situation got to the point that Muhammad considered divorcing all of his wives, as his companion Umar related: “The wives of the Prophet out of their jealousy, backed each other against the Prophet, so I said to them, ‘It may be, if he divorced you all, that Allah will give him, instead of you wives better than you.’ So this Verse was revealed (66.5).” (al-Bukhari: vol. 6, book 60, no. 438) Once again, Allah came to the rescue with a verse clearly intended to warn and intimidate the wives: “*It may be if he divorced you (all) that his Lord will give him instead of you, wives better than you, Muslims (who submit to Allah), believers, obedient to Allah, turning to Allah in repentance, worshipping Allah sincerely, fasting or emigrants (for Allah’s sake), previously married and virgins*” (**Q. 66:5**).

Muhammad permitted himself a license toward women that he permitted no one else—sex with a pre-pubescent girl, taking his adopted son’s wife, sex with sisters, sex without marriage, showing favoritism among his wives, and multiple wives beyond what the Qur’an permitted anyone else—and all permitted by Qur’anic revelations specifically directed to his own extraordinary conduct (often revelations given “after the fact” to excuse what he had already done). Even among his own wives, the multiple jealousies, conspiracies, and favoritisms show Muhammad’s conduct to be rather less than “*a beautiful pattern (of conduct)*” (**Q. 33:21**). Gilchrist summarizes, “Far from being an example of how polygamy can work harmoniously the story of Muhammad’s marriages tends to reinforce the Biblical ideal of monogamy. It is not a question of whether a man can treat his many wives equally with each other, the real question is how can he treat them equally with himself. . . . It surely goes without saying that a husband cannot truly reciprocate his wife’s total devotion to him if he has to divide his own affections between a host of consorts.” (Gilchrist 1994: 84-85)

C. Muhammad and power

As Muhammad’s power increased, “He justified every act of his, no matter how hideous, as an act of Allah—and cast himself as the perfect example for all mankind. Eventually he elevated himself to the level where ‘Allah and his Apostle’ became indistinguishable. The phrase ‘Allah and his Apostle’ is littered all over the Medinan Suras—in sharp contrast to the Meccan.” (Sundiata 2006: 331, e.g., **Q. 3:31; 4:14, 65, 69, 80; 7:157; 8:20; 33:66, 71; 47:33; 48:10; 57:7, 28; 59:7; 64:8**) As the hadith says, “Whatever the Messenger of Allah made unlawful, it is the same as what Allah made unlawful” (at-Tirmidhi: 2664). Multiple ahadith report Muhammad stating, “Whoever obeys me, obeys Allah; and whoever disobeys me, disobeys Allah” (Ibn Majah: vol. 1, book 1, no. 3; see also vol. 4, book 4, no. 2859; al-Bukhari: 2956, 2957, 7137; Muslim: 1835a, b, c; an-Nasa’i: 4193, 5510). He even made obedience to himself the criterion for entry into Paradise: “Allah’s Messenger said, ‘All my followers will enter Paradise except those who refuse.’ They said, ‘O Allah’s Messenger! Who will refuse?’ He said, ‘Whoever obeys me will enter Paradise, and whoever disobeys me is the one who refuses (to enter it).’” (al-Bukhari: 7280) His demands were so absolute that he claimed to make his decisions in consultation with Allah; consequently, his followers could not question anything he decided or have any option other than to unquestioningly obey everything he said: “*It is not fitting for a Believer, man or woman, when a matter has been decided by Allah and His Messenger to have any option about their decision: if any one disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he is indeed on a clearly wrong Path*” (**Q. 33:36**).

His control over Muslims was total. To insure his total control, Muhammad made leaving or

apostasizing from Islam punishable by death: “Ali burnt some people and this news reached Ibn Abbas, who said, Had I been in his place I would not have burnt them, as the Prophet said, ‘Don’t punish (anybody) with Allah’s Punishment.’ No doubt, I would have killed them, for the Prophet said, ‘If somebody (a Muslim) discards his religion, kill him.’” (al-Bukhari: 3017; see also an-Nasa’i: 4019, 4059, 4061, 4062, 4063, 4064, 4721, 4743; at-Tirmidhi: 1402, 2158; Abi Dawud: 4352, 4765; Ibn Majah: vol. 3, book 20, no. 2533, 2534)

D. Muhammad and murder

Muhammad enforced his will with ruthless brutality. After his move to Medina, Muhammad became the leader of a powerful army. By its nature, warfare is brutal. However, Muhammad’s brutality included the slaughter of helpless prisoners and the murder of innocents based on personal pique. For example, after the Battle of the Trench in AD 627 when various tribes had besieged Medina but had been defeated by Muhammad’s forces (an event recounted in **Q. 33:9-27**), Muhammad’s forces surrounded the quarter of the Jewish tribe of the Banu Qurayza. They asked for mercy or to be exiled as Muhammad had done for two other tribes after other battles. Instead, Muhammad appointed Sa’d b. Mu’adh who pronounced judgment “that the men should be killed, the property divided, and the women and children taken as captives” (Ibn Ishaq 1955: 464). Ishaq reports that “then the Apostle went out to the market of Medina (which is still its market today) and dug trenches in it. Then he sent for them and struck off their heads in those trenches as they were brought to him in batches. . . . There were 600 or 700 in all, though some put the figure as high as 800 or 900.” (Ibid.; see also Gilchrist 1994: 73-75) **Q. 8:67** (Hilali-Khan) confirms Muhammad’s ethic of making “*a great slaughter (among his enemies)*” instead of taking “*prisoners of war (and free them with ransom)*.” Muhammad’s attitude toward captured prisoners is shown when, following his victory at the Battle of Badr, he had a prisoner named ‘Uqba killed. Ibn Ishaq reports, “When the apostle ordered him to be killed, ‘Uqbasaid, ‘But who will look after my children, O Muhammad?’ ‘Hell,’ he said.” (Ibn Ishaq 1955: 308)

His brutality was not limited to war but included personal matters. Ibn Ishaq’s biography recounts how Kinana b. al-Rabi allegedly had some treasure that Muhammad wanted. Ishaq reports, “So the apostle gave orders to al-Zubayr b. al-Awwam, ‘Torture him until you extract what he has,’ so he kindled a fire with flint and steel on his chest until he was nearly dead. Then the apostle delivered him to Muhammad b. Maslama and he struck off his head.” (Ibn Ishaq 1955: 515) Muhammad also ordered the murder of Abu Rafi, a Jew who apparently had fallen out with Muhammad over the change in direction of worship from Jerusalem to Mecca (Sundiata 2006: 351; see al-Bukhari: 4039, 4040; Ibn Ishaq 1955: 482-83). Muhammad ordered the murders of Abu ‘Afak and Asma, the daughter of Marwan, apparently for no greater “crimes” than each having written a poem expressing disaffection with Muhammad for having killed various people (Ibid.: 675-76). Muhammad similarly ordered the murders of other personal enemies. In these cases he authorized the murderers to lie and deceive their victims and murder them in cold-blood. One such victim was Ka’b bin Ashraf, a Jew, killed for the “crime” of composing “amatory verses of an insulting nature about the Muslim women” (Ibn Ishaq 1955: 366-68; see al-Bukhari: 3032, 4037; Muslim: 1801).

Sunan Abi Dawud recounts another incident where Muhammad approved the murder of a pregnant mother for the sole reason that she had made disparaging remarks about Muhammad to her slave master: “A blind man had a slave-mother who used to abuse the Prophet and disparage him. He forbade her but she did not stop. He rebuked her but she did not give up her habit. One night she began to slander the Prophet and abuse him. So he took a dagger, placed it on her belly, pressed it, and killed her. A child who came between her legs was smeared with the blood that was there. When the morning came, the Prophet was informed about it. He assembled the people and said: ‘I adjure by Allah the man who has done this action and I adjure him by my right to him that he should stand up.’ Jumping over the necks of the people and trembling the man stood up. He sat before the Prophet and said: ‘Messenger of Allah! I am her master; she used to abuse you and disparage you. I forbade her, but she did not stop, and I rebuked her, but she did not abandon her habit. I have two sons like pearls from her, and she was my companion. Last night she began to abuse and disparage you. So I took a dagger, put it on her belly and pressed it till I killed her.’ Thereupon the Prophet said: ‘Oh be witness, no retaliation is payable for her blood.’” (Abi Dawud: 4361) This sort of behavior directly implicates Muhammad’s character and prophethood: “Will a true prophet of God condone the cold-blooded murder of a mother and her child? Does not the murder of an innocent child matter to him? A double murder has been committed and Muhammad did not even bother to investigate to ascertain whether this murderer was lying to escape punishment.” (“The Qur’an Disqualifies” 2013: Muhammad Disqualifies Himself as a True Prophet)

These are not isolated or atypical incidents. Nehls and Eric state, “When studying the biographic materials of Muhammad’s life, we find that he ordered at least 27 assassinations” (Nehls and Eric 2009: 33; see also Sundiata 2006: 349-61; Gilchrist 1994: 63-77). Finally, as noted above, he authorized the murder of anyone

who leaves Islam (al-Bukhari: 3017; see also Muslim: 1676c; an-Nasa'i: 4016, 4019, 4058, 4059, 4061, 4062, 4063, 4064, 4721, 4743; at-Tirmidhi: 1402, 1413, 2158; Abi Dawud: 4352; Ibn Majah: vol. 3, book 20, no. 2533, 2534; vol. 3, book 21, no. 2659, 2660). He added that “no Muslim should be killed for killing a disbeliever” (an-Nasa'i: 4744; see also 4735, 4745, 4746; al-Bukhari: 111, 6903, 6915; Abi Dawud: 2751; at-Tirmidhi: 1412; Ibn Majah: vol. 3, book 21, no. 2658). Can anyone honestly say this is “*a beautiful pattern (of conduct)*”? Whether or not it is beautiful, this was Muhammad’s pattern of conduct, and it influences Islam and Muslims to this day.

X. Jesus and Muhammad: Conclusion

The differences between Christianity and Islam largely stem from the differences between Jesus and Muhammad. In all of the major areas of life we have considered, the differences in character between Muhammad and Jesus Christ are plain and profound. Muhammad’s true character was clearly revealed after he ascended to power in Medina. When he had the ability to do so, Muhammad instituted special privileges of gain for himself and even had al-Zubayr b. al-Awwam tortured and beheaded to get monetary gain. On the other hand, Jesus said, “*The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head*” (**Matt 8:20; Luke 9:58**). He had to ride into Jerusalem for the last time on a borrowed donkey (**Matt 21:1-6; Mark 11:1-6; Luke 19:29-35**) and ate his last meal in a borrowed room (**Matt 26:17-19; Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-13**). Jesus repeatedly taught about the dangers of the love of money and how it turns one from devotion to God (e.g., **Matt 6:19-24; 13:7, 22; 19:16-26; Mark 4:7, 18-19; 10:17-27; Luke 8:7, 14; 12:13-34; 16:1-13; 18:18-27**). He taught, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive*” (**Acts 20:35**; see also **Matt 5:42; Mark 12:41-44; Luke 6:30, 38; 21:1-4**). And Jesus’ life was consistent with his teaching; he gave everything he had, including the only thing he ever owned (the clothes he wore, **Matt 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34**)—indeed, he gave his very life—for the sake of others. Is there any doubt about which of the two was the self-centered taker and which was the others’-centered giver?

Muhammad did not abide by the rules he imposed on others regarding marriage and sex but instead took any woman he wanted regardless of whether she was a child playing with dolls or his own son’s wife. He played favorites among his many wives and concubines which led to marital jealousies and discord. On the other hand, contrary to Islam’s polygamy and Muhammad’s special polygamous privileges, Jesus taught that God had ordained “*from the beginning of creation . . . the two shall become one flesh; so they are no longer two, but one flesh*” (**Mark 10:6-8; Matt 19:4-6**). Further, contrary to Muhammad’s self-centered approach to women and sex, Jesus said, “*I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart*” (**Matt 5:28**). One need hardly ask whose ethic of marriage and sexual relationships is better, fairer, and more loving.

Muhammad took all power for himself. He imposed rules on others that did not apply to himself and threatened all who opposed him with physical death and eternal damnation in hell. On the other hand, on the night before he died Jesus washed his disciples’ feet, an act that a household slave would do. He said to them, “*Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.*” (**John 13:12-15**) When two of his disciples sought preferential treatment, Jesus told them, “*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.*” (**Matt 20:25-28**; see also **Mark 10:42-45; Luke 22:25-27**) On another occasion he taught his disciples, “*If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all*” (**Mark 9:35**; see also **Matt 20:16**). Again, one need hardly ask whose ethic of power leads to the happiness and betterment of mankind.

Muhammad treated his opponents, even those who merely had composed satiric verses against him, with extreme brutality. He ordered that his companions lie, deceive, and murder those he did not like, and he personally massacred hundreds of helpless people. On the other hand, Jesus said, “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy*” (**Matt 5:7**). Later in that discourse he taught, “*You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.*” (**Matt 5:21-22**) He further taught, “*You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.*” (**Matt 5:43-45**) At the end of that

same discourse Jesus summarized, *“In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets”* (**Matt 7:12**; see also **Luke 6:31**). Jesus did not just teach these things to others, but he lived what he taught. When Jesus was being arrested, his disciple Peter drew his sword and cut off the right ear of the high priest’s slave; but Jesus said, *“‘Stop! No more of this.’ And He touched his ear and healed him.”* (**Luke 22:51**; see also **Matt 26:51-52**; **Mark 14:47**; **John 18:10-11**) Again, it is obvious that Jesus’ ethic of life leads to reconciliation and peace among people, whereas Muhammad’s ethic of life leads to anger, hatred, cruelty, and war.

In none of the areas we have considered was Muhammad forced by circumstances beyond his control to do any of the evil deeds he did. When he did these deeds he held all the power. Consequently, his actions reveal what was inside the man—his true heart—just as Jesus had taught: *“That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man.”* (**Mark 7:20-23**; see also **Matt 15:19-20**) Muhammad was guilty of virtually everything Jesus listed among the things that defile a man; the above brief look at his life and character discloses, at minimum, Muhammad’s evil thoughts, fornications, murders, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, and pride. Those sins are not minor matters only at the “surface” level—they are not an “occasional minor mistake” (Dirks 2008: 187) or “an unintentional error in judgment committed by a sinless prophet” (Emerick 2004: 201). Instead, what the Qur’an and the Hadith themselves have described are deep sins of Muhammad’s character which reveal his true nature. On the other hand, even the Qur’an acknowledges that Jesus was not guilty of those or any other sins and did not have even one character flaw. Jesus’ nature and character were pure and were entirely good—and his life demonstrated it. When the lives and characters of Jesus and Muhammad are compared side-by-side, it is obvious which one demonstrates the *“beautiful pattern of conduct”* (**Q. 33:21**) and which one does not.

Neither Muhammad nor his “revelations” rose above the level of the mindset and psychology of seventh century Arabia. He hated, regarded as enemies, and ordered his followers to kill those who did not embrace Islam. In stark contrast, Jesus did not regard as enemies those who disagreed with him but was able to forgive his real enemies, and he taught his followers to *“love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”* (**Matt 5:44**). Jesus sacrificed himself for others; Muhammad sacrificed others for himself. Even their relationship with their followers differed. Despite being the very Son of God, Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. Can one even imagine Muhammad doing that? It is true that Jesus’ followers are not all perfect, loving, and forgiving—but Jesus was. It is also true that Muhammad’s followers are not all violent, hateful, and vindictive—but Muhammad was. One need hardly ask: Would the world be a better, more peaceful and loving place if people followed the example and teachings of Jesus or Muhammad?

3. SIN AND SALVATION

I. Introduction

Sultan Muhammad Khan has raised the issue that goes to the heart of every religion, including Islam and Christianity: “The more I thought, the more evident it became to me that salvation is the vital breath of religion and its necessary foundation. Without it a religion is not a religion. Furthermore, I considered that all men agree that man, as his name indicates, is a bundle of forgetfulness, disobedience, and transgressions. His life never remains so pure as to be absolutely free from the stain of sin. Sin has become man’s second nature. It is a true saying that ‘to err is human’. The question is how can one escape accountability and punishment? How is one to be saved? What does Islam have to say about it? And what is the message of Christianity? It is my duty to investigate this important matter honestly and without prejudice.” (Khan 1992: 11)

There are many similarities between Christianity and Islam concerning the issue of sin, but there also are profound differences. Christianity’s and Islam’s positions concerning sin and salvation mirror their positions concerning Jesus Christ: the differences between the two go to the heart of the matter—the origin of sin, the nature of human beings, and the remedy for sin (how to be saved).

Khan pointed out to himself (and to us) why these issues are so important: “Sultan, consider that you are a child of an hour and the world is fleeting. When you die, your country and your inheritance will be of no benefit to you; nor will your family and friends be of help to you. All these belong to this world alone. Nothing but your faith can go beyond the grave. Therefore it is not wise to forsake eternal life and spiritual happiness for the sake of this transitory life.” (Ibid.: 29) Because of the importance of these issues and the “duty to investigate this important matter honestly and without prejudice,” we will attempt to do that in this chapter.

II. Sin and Salvation According to Christianity

The Bible lays out a comprehensive and coherent (i.e., logically connected and internally consistent) explanation for the origin of sin, the nature of humanity, and the rescue (salvation) of humanity from the problem of sin. The main features are as follows:

A. *The meaning of sin*

The biblical emphasis concerning sin stems from God's relationship with his creatures. Thus, the essence of sin according to the Bible is what John Stott calls "the godless self-centeredness of sin" (Stott 1986: 90). In other words, "Every sin is a breach of what Jesus called 'the first and great commandment' [*"YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND"*] (**Matt 22:36-38; Mark 12:28-30**), not just by failing to love God with all our being, but by actively refusing to acknowledge and obey him as our Creator and Lord. . . . Worse still, we have dared to proclaim our self-dependence, our autonomy, which is to claim the position occupied by God alone. Sin is not a regrettable lapse from conventional standards; its essence is hostility to God (Rom. 8:7), issuing in active rebellion against him." (Ibid.) This sinful predisposition separates us from God (**Isa 59:1-2**)

It is therefore no surprise that in the Ten Commandments the first commandment is specifically directed against *idolatry*, i.e., elevating anything or anyone over God (**Exod 20:3; Deut 5:7**). Martin Luther explained: "All those who do not at all times trust God and do not in all their works or sufferings, life and death, trust in His favor, grace and good-will, but seek His favor in other things or in themselves, do not keep this [the first] Commandment, and practise real idolatry, even if they were to do the works of all the other Commandments, and in addition had all the prayers, fasting, obedience, patience, chastity, and innocence of all the saints combined. For the chief work is not present, without which all the others are nothing but mere sham, show and pretense, with nothing back of them." (Luther 1520: X) Timothy Keller puts it like this, "The very first of the Ten Commandments is to 'have no other gods before me [**Exod 20:3; Deut 5:7**].' So, according to the Bible, the primary way to define sin is not just the doing of bad things, but the making of good things into *ultimate* things. It is seeking to establish a sense of self by making something else more central to your significance, purpose, and happiness than your relationship to God." (Keller 2008: 162) Thus, in a real sense the party who is primarily injured when we sin is God. David recognized this when he repented for having committed adultery with Bathsheba and cried out to God, "*Against You, You only, I have sinned*" (**Ps 51:4**). Nevertheless, because God is the ultimate good and is sovereign over the entire universe, to sin against Him necessarily affects everything else, i.e., sin harms ourselves, harms others, and harms the world.

God "*does not tempt anyone*" to sin (**Jas 1:13**); rather, humanity's fundamental self-centeredness and separation from God leads to every specific sin, i.e., every moral evil committed by people (see **Jas 1:13-15**). Such sins may be passive, the failure to do what God has commanded (i.e., sins of *omission*; e.g., **Luke 12:47; Jas 4:17**), or sins may be active, doing things prohibited by God (i.e., sins of *commission*; e.g., **Exod 20:13-16**). Because sin is grounded in people's relationship with God, sin exists not only in external actions but also in internal attitudes and the dispositions of the heart: what is expressed externally in words and deeds is a reflection of what is inside a person heart (**Exod 20:17; Prov 23:7; Matt 5:21-22, 27-28; Mark 7:20-23**). Therefore, Christianity can never be reduced to a list of "dos and don'ts."

B. *The origin of sin and its effects on people*

In human history, **Genesis 3** recounts that sin originated in the garden of Eden when Satan tempted Eve; both Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command and ate from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Adam and Eve's sin affected themselves psychologically (**Gen 3:7**), interpersonally (**Gen 3:16**), and relationally with God (**Gen 3:8-10**). Additionally, according to the biblical view all of humanity was in some sense "in Adam" (**Rom 5:12-19; 1 Cor 15:22**). Thus, Adam and Eve's sin affected everyone else throughout history and resulted in the moral and ethical corruption of human nature. This is what is known as the "Fall" of mankind. Sin entered into Adam and Eve and, after the Fall every human being since Adam and Eve has been born in a state of moral corruption—an internal predisposition to sin—which leads to universal actualized sins as people go through lives (e.g., **Gen 8:21; Ps 51:5; 143:1-2; Jer 17:9; Mark 7:20-23; Rom 3:9-18, 23; 5:12-14; 7:14-24**). Indeed, sin dwells in people; it is a "law" or power that is actively working inside every person (**Rom 7:5, 8-11, 14-24; Gal 5:17; Heb 3:12-13**). God had warned Adam that to eat the forbidden fruit would surely result in death (**Gen 2:17**). That same principle applies to all people: "*Just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned*" (**Rom 5:12**).

This is the doctrine of "original sin." "Original sin is not the sin that Adam and Eve committed. It is the *result* of that first sin. Original sin has reference to our sinful condition, our sinful bent, our sinful inclination

from which actual sin flows. In other words, *we sin because we are sinners*. We are not sinners because we sin. Since the fall of mankind it is now the nature of human beings to be inclined and drawn to sinfulness.” (Sproul 2002: 34, *emph. in orig.*) Our inner corruption is such that even our good deeds are not entirely pure but bear, to one degree or another, the taint of self-centeredness, self-aggrandizement, or are motivated by such things as fear, guilt, pride, greed, etc. Consequently, sin can be expressed in two radically different ways: either “being very bad and breaking all the rules [or] being very good and keeping all the rules and becoming self-righteous” (Keller 2008: 177). That is why Isaiah says that “*all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment*” (Isa 64:6).

Further, our corruption is such that we cannot consistently and completely meet even our own standards, let alone God’s. Spiritually speaking, our corruption is such that “every person born into the world is tainted by the Fall such that all of humanity is ethically debilitated, and people are powerless to rehabilitate themselves, unless rescued by God” (“Original sin” n.d.: Introduction; see **John 3:3, 5; 6:44, 65; 8:34; Rom 6:16-17, 20; 8:6-8; 1 Cor 2:14; Eph 2:1-3; 8-9; Heb 11:6**). Because sin is an active part of our very nature which separates us from God and corrupts even outwardly good deeds, the Bible accurately describes people as being “slaves to sin” (**John 8:34; Rom 6:6, 16-17, 20; 7:14**). Thus, “*There is none righteous, not even one. . . . There is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside. . . . There is none who does good, there is not even one.*” (**Rom 3:10-12**) Without God’s intervention each person would remain “*dead in your trespasses and sins*” (**Eph 2:1**).

C. The impossibility of people saving themselves by their good deeds

Every person knows in his or her heart that we have a fundamental problem deep within us that we cannot eradicate. Many people tend to downplay the seriousness of this by saying something like “to err is human.” However, we must consider what we are like in relation to God. God’s holiness is foundational. Sin is incompatible with his holiness. Closely related to God’s holiness is his wrath. God’s wrath “is in fact his holy reaction to evil. . . . What is common to the biblical concepts of the holiness and the wrath of God is the truth that they cannot coexist with sin. God’s holiness exposes sin; his wrath opposes it. So sin cannot approach God, and God cannot tolerate sin.” (Stott 1986: 102, 103, 106; see **Hab 1:13; Rom 1:18**)

There is an important corollary to all this, namely, that “God is not indifferent to our immoral thoughts and behaviour. On the contrary, his holy nature is deeply offended by such things. As a perfect God, he cannot ignore anything evil. The smallest lie is an offense to the One who is truth. The tiniest feeling of animosity towards another person is repulsive to the One who is love. Due to his holy and perfect nature God cannot turn a blind eye to perverse human behaviour as if it does not matter.” (Alexander 2008: 130) Consequently, “if God is to be true to his own righteous nature, all wrongdoing must be punished. In addition, if God is to condemn and punish Satan, then he must be consistent in condemning and punishing . . . every other creature that has rebelled against his divine authority.” (Ibid.: 131; see **Rom 2:16; 2 Cor 5:10; Heb 9:27; Rev 20:10-15**)

Many people think that God will accept (save) them if they do enough “good deeds.” They think, “If my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds, I’m in!” However, that approach to salvation is doomed to failure for at least five reasons:

- First, because God himself is morally holy and perfect, that is the standard to which God holds us (**Matt 5:48**). However, “once a person sins, it is impossible to ever be perfect” (Sproul 2002: 94; see also *ibid.*: 53).
- Second, even our good deeds are tainted with sin and typically arise from mixed motives. Indeed, if we are doing good deeds in order to escape God’s punishment and hell, that alone makes our good deeds *not* “good.” The reason is that if our motive is to escape hell by doing “good deeds,” then those deeds are, by definition, selfish and self-centered, e.g., when we help the poor, we are really primarily helping *ourselves* avoid hell. Thus, no amount of good deeds, since they themselves are tainted with sin, can atone for other sins.
- Third, it is impossible to ever know whether one has “done enough” good deeds or made enough sacrifices to satisfy God. Timothy Keller states, “The moral and spiritual standards of all religions are very high, and Pharisees [i.e., all who try to save themselves by doing good deeds and obeying religious rules] know deep down that they are not fully living up to those standards. They are not praying as often as they should. They are not loving and serving their neighbors as much as they should. They are not keeping their inner thoughts as pure as they should.” (Keller 2008: 178)
- Fourth, no amount of good deeds changes the sinful nature and sinful propensities of the heart. Thus, good deeds do not transform corrupt, sinful people into righteous, sinless people at their core; they remain sinful people. If God let sinful people into heaven and the new earth in which people will live forever (**Revelation 21-22**), heaven and the new earth would be forever corrupted. God could not be there since “sin cannot approach God, and God cannot tolerate sin” (Stott 1986: 106). Indeed, given humanity’s innate

corruption and sinful propensities, heaven would be turned into a hell.

- Fifth, ultimately sin is against God because God's law comes from him and is a reflection of his holy nature; therefore, to sin by transgressing his law is to offend him personally. Further, to sin against other people is to sin against God because people are made in the image of God (**Gen 1:26-27; 9:6; Jas 3:9-10**); sin amounts to dishonoring and defiling God's image and thereby reveals what the sinner really thinks about God himself. The situation is similar to when a person commits a crime against another person; the criminal violates not only the person but primarily violates the law of the state. Hence, it is the government which prosecutes the lawbreaker, not the wronged individual. Sin also is like dropping a rock into a pool of water; the rock creates ripples from its point of entry to the surrounding waters. In the same way sin permanently corrupts and changes the sinner, other people, and the world in ways perhaps unknown to the sinner. Therefore, any "good deeds" or other things we try to do to atone for our sin and earn our salvation, by their very nature, are *temporal and imperfect*. They do not transform the sinner into a holy person and they cannot eliminate the effects of the sin which has *permanently* corrupted the sinner's soul and has affected other people and the world. Finally, God is infinite: infinitely holy; infinitely lovely; infinitely good. Therefore, our obligation to him is infinite (**Deut 6:5; Matt 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27**). Therefore, our sin against him amounts to an infinite evil. In short, there is no such thing as a finite offense against an infinite God. Consequently, no temporal, finite, and imperfect deeds of ours can ever hope to atone for the infinity of our sin. As John Stott concludes, "If we are ever to be forgiven, we must repay what we owe [see Anselm 1903: I:11]. Yet we are incapable of doing this, either for ourselves or for other people. Our present obedience and good works cannot make satisfaction for our sins, since these are required of us anyway. So we cannot save ourselves." (Stott 1986: 119)

Since we cannot save ourselves, "some may say the problem is not severe because God in His kindness will overlook it. God could do this if He were willing to negotiate His own righteousness or sacrifice His own justice." (Sproul 2002: 94) Even an earthly judge who didn't enforce the law but simply let the guilty go free without punishment would be universally recognized as unjust.¹⁰ That is why God cannot just say, "In My mercy and compassion, I forgive you sinful people." Because all humans are corrupt at their core and sin against God in thought, word, and deed, no amount of "good deeds," rule keeping, or other actions could ever hope to atone for our sin. Thus, if left to themselves, all humans have earned and deserve only God's judgment. This results in a profound dilemma: "Man as a sinner owes God for his sin what he is unable to pay, and cannot be saved without paying" (Anselm 1903: I:25).

¹⁰ The Bible says that the ultimate punishment for sin against God is what is called the "*lake of fire*" or "*the second death*" (**Rev 19:20; 20:6, 10, 14-15**). While some object to this idea, there are at least two responses to such objections: (1) justice, and (2) respect for human dignity and choice. Nicola Yacoub Ghabril states the first response: "Both Islamic and civil law prescribe that the punishment for transgression or crime shall be severe or mild in proportion to the one sinned against. For instance, if a student at school insults his fellow pupil, he is punished lightly, whereas if he insults his teacher he would be expelled from school. In legislative terms, if someone reviles his equal it is considered an offence, but if he insults the judge his punishment would be greater. However, if he insults the king his sentence would be greater still. But if he should sin against God, who is unsurpassed in greatness and holiness, how much more would be his punishment! Doubtless he would be condemned to painful endless torment." (Ghabril 2003: 20)

Timothy Keller articulates the second response: "In Romans 1-2 Paul explains that God, in his wrath against those who reject him, 'gives them up' to the sinful passions of their hearts. . . . In Ephesians 4:19 it is said that sinners give themselves up to their sinful desires. It means that the worst (and fairest) punishment God can give a person is to allow them their sinful hearts' deepest desire. What is that? The desire of the sinful human heart is for independence. We want to choose and go our own way (Isaiah 53:6). . . . What is hell, then? It is God actively giving us up to what we have freely chosen-to go our own way, be our own 'the master of our fate, the captain of our soul,' to get away from him and his control. It is God banishing us to regions we have desperately tried to get into all our lives. . . . The idea of hell is implausible to people because they see it as unfair that infinite punishment would be meted out for comparably minor, finite false steps (like not embracing Christianity.) Also, almost no one knows anyone (including themselves) that seems to be bad enough to merit hell. But the Biblical teaching on hell answers both of these objections. First, it tells us that people only get in the afterlife what they have most wanted-either to have God as Savior and Master or to be their own Saviors and Masters. Secondly, it tells us that hell is a natural consequence. Even in this world it is clear that self-centeredness rather than God-centeredness makes you miserable and blind. . . . On the other hand, a soul that has decided to center its life on God and his glory moves toward increasing joy and wholeness. We can see both of these 'trajectories' even in this life. But if, as the Bible teaches, our souls will go on forever, then just imagine where these two kinds of souls will be in a billion years. Hell is simply one's freely chosen path going on forever. We wanted to get away from God, and God, in his infinite justice, sends us where we wanted to go." (Keller 2009: sec.3)

D. Salvation according to Christianity: what Christ accomplished on the cross

Only Christianity has a credible and coherent answer to the above dilemma. Christianity alone recognizes and takes seriously the “fallenness” of human beings, the gravity of sin, the holiness and perfection of God, the incompatibility of God and sin coexisting together, the fact that all humans have earned and deserve judgment for their sins, and the inability of people by their own efforts to save themselves. The difference of Christianity is Jesus; the difference of Christianity is the cross. Keller points out, “All other major faiths have founders who are teachers that show the way to salvation. Only Jesus claimed to actually *be* the way of salvation himself.” (Keller 2008: 174) Anselm of Canterbury puts it like this: Because man *cannot* satisfy his debt to God, “none but God *can* make this satisfaction. But none but a man *ought* to do this, other wise man does not make the satisfaction. If it be necessary, therefore, as it appears, that the heavenly kingdom be made up of men, and this cannot be effected unless the aforesaid satisfaction be made, which none but God can make and none but man ought to make, it is necessary for the God-man to make it. . . . Therefore, in order that the God-man may perform this, it is necessary that the same being should be perfect God and perfect man, in order to make this atonement. . . . Since, then, it is necessary that the God-man preserve the completeness of each nature, it is no less necessary that these two natures be united entire in one person, just as a body and a reasonable soul exist together in every human being; for otherwise it is impossible that the same being should be very God and very man.” (Anselm 1903: II:6-7) Only Jesus Christ meets the qualifications.

It is only this mysterious union of God and man in the person of Christ that enabled God both to inflict and endure the punishment of the cross. Jesus lived the life we should have lived *as a man*: he perfectly obeyed God the Father in everything; he was “*tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin*” (**Heb 4:15**). That qualified him to be our representative, to take upon himself our sin and pay the penalty that otherwise we would have to pay but never could (**Rom 8:1-4; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13; Col 2:13-14; 1 Tim 2:5-6; 1 Pet 2:24**). As Keller states, “God did not, then, inflict pain on someone else, but rather on the Cross absorbed the pain, violence, and evil of the world into himself. Therefore the God of the Bible is not like the primitive deities who demanded our blood for their wrath to be appeased. Rather, this is a God who becomes human and offers his own lifeblood in order to honor moral justice and merciful love so that he can destroy all evil without destroying us. . . . Why did Jesus *have* to die in order to forgive us? There was a debt to be paid—God himself paid it. There was a penalty to be borne—God himself bore it. . . . On the cross neither justice nor mercy loses out—both are fulfilled at once. Jesus’s death was necessary if God was going to take justice seriously and still love us.” (Keller 2008: 192-93, 197) Or, as Sultan Muhammad Khan puts it, “God is both merciful and just. If Christ had promised salvation without giving His life, the demands of mercy would certainly have been fulfilled. In order to satisfy the demands of justice also, Christ paid the ransom, which was His precious blood. In this way God has manifested His love for us.” (Khan 1992: 26) John Stott summarizes, “The essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives which belong to God alone; God accepts penalties which belong to man alone.” (Stott 1986: 160)

Christ bore our punishment on the cross so that we do not have to face God’s punishment for our sin; he was forsaken on the cross so that we can be accepted. In Christ, we are as free from the guilt and penalty of sin as if we had paid the full price for our sin ourselves (**Rom 6:3-7; Gal 2:20**). More than that, when we are united with Christ everything that is true of him is now true of us: he not only removes our guilt by having paid for our sin himself, but he also gives us his righteousness. Thus, only in Christ are we not condemned, but we are positively accepted, loved, and honored by God.

Only the above understanding explains Jesus’ cry from the cross, “*My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?*” (**Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34**) Muslim apologists clearly do not understand what was going on when Jesus uttered that cry. For example, Hilali states, “This is a blatant declaration of disbelief according to all theological authorities” (Al-Hilali 1998: 913). Abdullah Hadi Al-Kahtani says that on the cross Christ was trying to “trick Satan,” and “these words . . . were spoken so that the Devil will not know that he [Jesus] was ‘God’ or ‘the son of God’” (Al-Kahtani 1996: 14-15). Neither Hilali nor Kahtani are even remotely close to being accurate. So what was going on?

Christianity, unlike Islam, recognizes that “forgiveness is always a form of costly suffering” (Keller 2008: 193). When someone has been wronged and damaged, the first option “is to demand that [the wrongdoer] pay for the damages. The second is to refuse to let him pay anything. . . . Notice that in every option the cost of the damage must be borne by *someone*. Either you or he absorbs the cost for the deed, but the debt does not somehow vanish into thin air. . . . [To forgive someone means that] *you* are absorbing the debt, *taking the cost of it completely on yourself* instead of taking it out on the other person” (Ibid.: 187, 189, *emph. added*) To forgive

someone means that you not only suffer the original loss but also that you refuse to make the wrongdoer pay for what he has done. Thus, all forgiveness involves suffering—and the greater the wrong and the injury, the greater the cost and the suffering of the one who forgives.

The costliness of our sin and what it cost God to forgive us (i.e., “*His only begotten Son*,” **John 3:16**) is revealed by Jesus on the cross. What Jesus was doing on the cross was receiving the judgment, paying the cost, and taking onto himself the punishment due to sinful humanity. Why did Jesus cry, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” John Stott summarizes: “An actual and dreadful separation took place between the Father and the Son; it was voluntarily accepted by both the Father and the Son; it was due to our sins and their just reward; and Jesus expressed this horror of great darkness, the God-forsakenness, by quoting the only verse of Scripture which accurately described it and which he had perfectly fulfilled” (Stott 1986: 81).

Jesus’ cry from the cross also reveals something else: his perfect obedience (**Phil 2:8**). Throughout his life on earth Christ himself repeatedly stated that he did nothing on his own initiative but only did what the Father had him do (**John 5:19, 30; 6:38; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10**). His cry of “*My God*” reveals the intimacy of his relationship with the Father. On the cross, Jesus endured an infinity of suffering and the curse of the Father (**Gal 3:13**); yet he continued to obey the Father all the way to the end. Far from being “a blatant declaration of disbelief,” his cry was quoting **Ps 22:1**, a psalm of David, who was a prophet (see **Acts 2:30**). In quoting that psalm in those circumstances, Jesus was saying that **Ps 22:1** was pointing to and was being fulfilled in what he was doing on the cross. Jesus knew exactly what was going on. In essence, he was saying, “I trust you Father, I believe in your plan for the salvation of lost souls, and I love you so much that I will obey your will completely, even though it means my complete separation from you and having to endure the combined hells of sinful humanity.” What Christ did on the cross shows, in a way that no other religion even hints at, how valuable people are to God. Keller concludes, “Jesus suffered infinitely more than any human soul in eternal hell, yet he looks at us and says, ‘It was worth it.’ What could make us feel more loved and valued than that? The Savior presented in the gospel waded through hell itself rather than lose us, and no other savior ever depicted has loved us at such a cost.” (Keller 2009: sec.4)

Because the gospel—and people’s salvation—is based on what Christ has done, salvation cannot be “earned” by doing “good deeds.” Rather, salvation is *given* by God to people as a *gift* of his *grace*; it is *received* by people solely by *faith* in Christ. As **Eph 2:8-9** says, “*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*” To be saved means to repent of our sins, accept by faith what Christ has done for us, and turn to Christ as the Lord of our life (**Matt 11:28; Mark 1:14-15; John 1:12; 3:16; 17:3; Acts 26:20; 1 John 1:8-9**). The *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646) summarizes: “The principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life” (Westminster 1646: XIV:2).

E. Implications of sin and salvation according to Christianity

The biblical understanding of sin and the fact that Christ lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died (i.e., paid the price and took the judgment and punishment), have important implications which are not true of any other religion.

1. The doctrine of the “fall” of mankind gives Christians a coherent basis to fight against evil. Abbas Sundiata states, “The biblical worldview makes Jews and Christians struggle against the ravages of a world we see as fallen and abnormal. We struggle because we believe that we have a part to play in its redemption. This mind-set makes it possible for us to confront the problems presented by an abnormal world with the conviction that there is a solution. To those who hold this view of the world, everything has value and significance; time is important and can be redeemed instead of wasted or just allowed to pass by, and every individual has immense value because each has a part to play in this work of redemption. . . . There is no doubt that the Judeo-Christian doctrine of the fall conforms to the reality in the world; it explains the presence of sin and evil in a world created by a holy, good, loving, and powerful God; it affirms our freedom of choice; it tells us what has been done on our behalf by God despite ourselves and encourages us to work to change our circumstances.” (Sundiata 2006: 213-14)

2. All those who are united to Christ by faith have assurance of their salvation. If salvation depended even in part on our own efforts, we could never have the assurance that we had “done enough” to merit salvation. However, because God-in-Christ did for us what we could not do, Christians can and do have assurance that they are and forever will remain saved (see, e.g., **John 3:36; 6:37, 47; 11:25; 1 John 5:11-12**). Because the penalty for sin has been fully paid and the debt has been fully satisfied it can never again be demanded of anyone who is in Christ.

3. Being saved and united with Christ changes the legal status of Christians. “Objectively the cross

liberates from the power of sin, propitiates God's wrath, washes away the guilt and stain of sin, reconciles believers to God, and achieves cosmic victory over deadly spiritual foes" (Demarest 1997: 196). On the cross, not only was our sin imputed to him, but his righteousness was imputed to us! As **2 Cor 5:21** says, "*He [the Father] made Him who knew no sin [Christ] be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*" This deals with the issue of sinful people inheriting heaven and the new earth: everyone who is in Christ does not have "*a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith*" (**Phil 3:9**).

4. Being saved and united with Christ changes Christians on the inside. Subjectively, "Christ's example of suffering on our behalf releases a new moral power that transforms our attitudes, motives, and conduct" (Demarest 1997: 196). When one comes to Christ, he or she receives a new heart (**Ezek 36:26; 2 Cor 3:3**), the mind of Christ (**1 Cor 2:16**), and the Spirit from Christ (**Ezek 36:26; John 14:17**). Thus, the source of guidance and power to live righteously are not primarily external (conformity to rules and rituals) but are internal—it is Jesus, through his word, mind, and spirit, who now lives in and through his people. By the internal means given to the believer by Christ, Christ's people are inevitably and progressively being sanctified and changed on the inside "*to become conformed to the image of His Son [i.e., Jesus Christ]*" (**Rom 8:29**).

5. Being saved and united with Christ gives Christians an intimate, personal relationship with God through Christ. "The Christian gospel is that I am so flawed that Jesus had to die for me, yet I am so loved and valued that Jesus was glad to die for me. This leads to deep humility and deep confidence at the same time. . . . I cannot feel superior to anyone, and yet I have nothing to prove to anyone." (Keller 2008: 181) Thus, we can "*draw near with confidence to the throne of grace*" (**Heb 4:16**; see also **Heb 7:19**). Christians can have such confidence because they know they have a deep, personal relationship with God, because Christ is "in" believers (**John 14:20; 17:23; Rom 8:10; Gal 2:20; Eph 3:17; Col 1:27; 1 John 3:24; Rev 3:20**) and believers are "in Christ" (e.g., **Rom 8:1; 12:5; 16: 6, 7, 9-10; 1 Cor 1:2, 30; 4:10, 15; 15:18, 22; 2 Cor 1:21; 5:17; 12:2; Gal 1:22; 3:28; 6:15; Eph 1:3; 2:6, 10; Phil 1:1; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 2:14; 4:16; 1 Tim 3:13; 2 Tim 3:12; Phlm 23; 1 Pet 5:14**).

6. Being saved and united with Christ gives Christians a new motive and means of living. In terms of practical living, Christianity, again, is unique compared to every other religion, including Islam. "Religion operates on the principle 'I obey—therefore I am accepted by God.' But the operating principle of the gospel is 'I am accepted by God through what Christ has done—therefore I obey.'" (Keller 2008: 179-80)¹¹

The situation is similar to falling in love with someone: "Your love makes you eager for acceptance from the beloved. . . . [When you marry your beloved] Do you say, 'Great! I'm in! Now I can act any way I want'? Of course not. Now you don't even wait for the object of your affection to directly ask you to do something for them. You anticipate whatever pleases and delights them. There's no coercion or sense of obligation, yet your behavior has been radically changed by the mind and heart of the person you love." (Keller 2008: 183) That is why **Rom 6:1-2** says, "*What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?*"

III. Sin and Salvation According to Islam

In fundamental ways, Islam takes a different approach than Christianity's to both the issues of sin and salvation. In contrast to the Christian approach, however, Islam's approach is internally inconsistent with respect to both issues.

¹¹ We are saved for a purpose: "*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*" (**Eph 2:8-10**) The works we do after we receive Christ by faith "are an index of the spiritual condition of a person's heart. . . . The judgment is not a balancing of good works over bad works. Rather, works are seen as unmistakable evidence of the loyalty of the heart; they express belief or unbelief, faithfulness or unfaithfulness. The judgment will reveal whether or not people's loyalties have been with God and the Lamb or with God's enemies." (Ngundu 2006: 1576; see **Matt 6:19-21; 24:45-51; 25:31-46; Luke 42-48; Phil 2:12-13; 1 Tim 6:18-19; Heb 6:10-12; 1 John 4:7-21**)

Daniel Shayesteh concludes by pointing out, "We understand that the so-called Christian world has extensively failed to surrender itself to Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is the *disbelief* in Jesus Christ that has spread immorality among those who apparently live under the name of Christianity. For the Gospel of Jesus Christ, there is only one type of Christian in the world, only those who are saved from the ruler of immorality. Muslims, therefore, must not take the immorality of so-called Christian societies as a sign of the Christian faith having shortcomings." (Shayesteh 2004: 204, *emph. added*)

A. The nature of humanity in relation to sin according to Islam

The Qur'an includes the account of Adam and Eve eating forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden (Q. 2:35-37; 7:10-25; 20:115-23). However, the Qur'an also says, "No person earns any (sin) except against himself (only), and no bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another" (Q. 6:164, Hilali-Khan); "Who receiveth guidance, receiveth it for his own benefit: who goeth astray doth so to his own loss: No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another" (Q. 17:15); and "no burdened person (with sins) shall bear the burden (sins) of another" (Q. 53:38, Hilali-Khan; see also Q. 4:111; 7:23; 35:18; 39:7; 53:38-39). Islam takes such statements as applying not only to people today but also as applying to Adam and Eve. The "official" position of Islam therefore denies that Adam and Eve's sin resulted in the fall of mankind and denies the doctrine of "original sin." Emerick says, "Islam flatly rejects any notion of original sin and says we are all born pure. Yes, Adam and Eve sinned, the Qur'an says, but God forgave them when they asked for His mercy. No sin was passed on to their descendants." (Emerick 2004: 46) He adds, "We are not eternally defective as a species or naturally inclined to sin" (Ibid.: 150). Kahtani states, "Islam entertains no idea of the 'fall of man', no concept of 'original sin'. It holds no man to stand in an innate, necessary predicament out of which he cannot pull himself. Man, it holds, is innocent. He is born with his innocence. Indeed, he is born with a thousand given perfection[s], with faculties of understanding, and an innate sense with which to know the true God." (Al-Kahtani 1996: 24) That state of sinlessness remains "till the age of discretion" (Ibid.) or puberty (Zawadi n.d.: n.p.). In fact, the soul's "natural tendency is to strive towards good" (Karim 1939:3:122).

What, according to Islam, accounts for human sin? The IslamAnswering.com article says, "Whatever becomes of man after birth is the result of external influence and intruding factors. . . . If he chooses to actualize the potential of sin instead of the potential of goodness, he will be adding a new external element to his pure nature. For this added external element man alone is responsible." ("The Concept" 2009: n.p.) Emerick puts it this way, "We are merely forgetful of what life is about, and *Shaytan* [Satan] uses our desire for pleasure to accentuate this" (Emerick 2004: 150).

B. The concept of morality in Islam

In Islam, morality, good, and evil are not based on universal standards of right and wrong grounded in the nature and character of God himself and written on the human heart as Christianity teaches. Instead, according to Islam, it is the specific commands and prohibitions contained in the Qur'an and the Hadith that determine what is or is not moral, good, or evil. To attain "everlasting bliss in the Hereafter," Suhaym states that Allah "ordained His Law for you and commands you to obey Him. If you therefore believe, obeys [sic.] His Commandment and abstain from all He forbids you, you will attain what He promises you" (As-Suhaym 2006: 221; see also al-Athari 2005: 135). In his commentary on the *Mishkat*, Karim summarizes: "There are two-fold duties of a man, duty towards God and duty towards His creations. These duties were clearly laid down in the Quran and Hadis [Hadith]. Observance of these duties is called virtue, and the negligence or breach thereof is called sin. . . . Hence the observance of the rules of the Quran and Hadis is compulsory for preservation of the soul from the fire and for its continued progress." (Karim 1939: 3:121-22)

In following the dictates of the Qur'an and the Hadith, the *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* states, "Allah's law is not to be penetrated by the intelligence, it is *ta'abbudi*, i.e. man has to accept it without criticism, with its apparent inconsistencies and its incomprehensible decrees, as wisdom into which it is impossible to enquire. One must not look in it for causes in our sense, nor for principles; it is based on the will of Allah which is bound by no principles." (Gibb and Kramers 1953: 525) This is confirmed by Q. 5:101-02 which says, "Ask not questions about things which, if made plain to you, may cause you trouble. . . . Some people before you did ask such questions, and on that account lost their faith." Abdullah al-Athari quotes a number of noted Islamic scholars to the effect that, on matters that the Qur'an mentions but does not explain or that Muhammad did not explain in answer to questions from his companions (e.g., Allah's attributes, seeing Allah, how Allah "rose above his throne" [Q. 20:5; 57:4], how Allah descends), "Accept them as they are, without asking how. . . . Belief in it is obligatory and asking about it is *bid'ah* ["innovation," which is prohibited]." (al-Athari 2005: 86-87) Mawdudi states that Muhammad "discouraged people from being over-inquisitive and unnecessarily curious about every question" (Mawdudi n.d.: Q. 5:101n.116). In a well-attested hadith, Muhammad said, "The most sinful person among the Muslims is the one who asked about something which had not been prohibited, but was prohibited because of his asking" (al-Bukhari: 7289; see also Muslim: 2358b).

In sum, Islamic morality, good and evil, are defined by the shari'ah which is designed to regulate all aspects of a Muslim's life and "provide a ruling on any issue that may confront the Muslim community" (Emerick 2004: 55). Therefore, "reason cannot take precedence over shari'ah," but "reason must work within the framework of shari'ah" (al-Athari 2005: 175). The shari'ah is based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah; and since

the Qur'an is based solely on Muhammad's word, and the Sunnah is, by definition, the words and deeds of Muhammad, in Islam "Muhammad is at the center, the standard by which all behavior is measured" (Spencer 2009: 94). As Ram Swarup puts it, "Morality does not determine the Prophet's actions, but his actions determine and define morality (Swarup 2002: 11).

C. The concept of sin in Islam

Sin is a complicated matter for Muslims because Islam "is not only a system of theological doctrine, but also makes a comprehensive claim on the unschooled layperson. Islam is an ordering of life for the family and for society; it prescribes clothing as well as dietary regulations just as it imposes laws regulating marriage and inheritance. Exact regulations are to be observed in prayer, fasting, and the pilgrimage to Mecca, regulations that are not placed at the discretion of the individual. These regulations have the status of religious law, the disregard of which makes the respective action (prayer, for example) invalid before God." (Schirrmacher 2011: 13; see also As-Suhaym 2006: 202-03) Emerick summarizes that, contrary to Christianity, "Islamic Law, which is derived from the rules contained in the Qur'an and the oral traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, is a detailed code concerned with do's and don'ts, good and evil, and relations among people" (Emerick 2004: 33).

1. Under Islamic law, all actions are either *halal* (allowed) or *haram* (prohibited). "In keeping with the Islamic spirit of planning for all eventualities, there are two other categories by which actions can be judged. These are things permissible, though not encouraged; and things disliked, though not sinful." (Emerick 2004: 264) Pursuant to this rule-based, legalistic notion of sin, Islam has multiple categories or gradations of sin. There is a basic division between "*kabirah*, 'great,' and *saghirah*, 'little' sins" (Hughes 1895: 594). However, Islamic law does not clearly differentiate between the two. For example, Karim states, "Any breach of the fundamental duties of which the performance is Farz (compulsory) and Wajeb (obligatory) is called a great sin. Any breach of other minor duties is called a minor sin. Breach of any duty which the Holy Prophet used to do constantly without any break is a great sin. Constant repetition of a minor sin makes it a major one." (Karim 1939: 3:127) There is no definitive list of "great sins." Ghabril lists 17 generally agreed upon major sins (Ghabril 2003: 15). Karim's commentary on the *Mishkat* lists 53 (Karim 1939: 3:128-29).

2. The greatest sins in Islam are *shirk* (associating partners with Allah) and *kufr* (unbelief). The greatest of all sins is *shirk*, which is associating partners with Allah. One Muslim author says, "Murder, rape, child molesting and genocide. These are all some of the appalling crimes which occur in our world today. Many would think that these are the worst possible offences which could be committed. But there is something which outweighs all of these crimes put together: It is the crime of *shirk*. . . Linguistically, *shirk* means a partnership or to share or associate. However, Islamically it is to give to other than Allah, that which belongs solely to Allah. This means that parts of Allah's creation are given powers and attributes which belong to Allah, thus, ultimately sending worship to other than Allah alone." ("*Shirk*" 1997: Introduction; The Reality of *Shirk*)

There are two main kinds of *shirk*: major and minor; but there is also "hidden [or invisible] *shirk*" which may be either major or minor ("The types" 2016: n.p.; At-Tamimi 2002: 212-15). Major *shirk* is "to devote any form of worship to anyone other than Allah" (At-Tamimi 2002: 212; see also "*Shirk*" 1997: *Shirk in the Worship of Allah* [Eebaadah]). Tamimi lists four subcategories of major *shirk*: (1) invocation (i.e., supplicating other than Allah [Q. 29:65]); (2) intention, will, and purpose (i.e., desiring the life of the world [Q. 11:15-16]); (3) obedience (i.e., readiness to comply with the orders of others in disobedience to Allah [Q. 9:31]); and (4) love (i.e., showing love to others which is due to Allah alone [Q. 2:165]) (At-Tamimi 2002: 212-14). Allah will never forgive at least major *shirk* (see Q. 4:48, 116; 17:39; 39:65; 98:6).¹² Muhammad said that minor *shirk* is "showing-off (of good deeds)" (al-Asqalani n.d.: book 16, no. 1527; see also At-Tamimi 2002: 2015; "The types" 2016: One example of *ash-Shirk ul-Asghar*).

Shirk can be very subtle. "Hidden *Shirk* is one of the most dangerous forms of *shirk* as people cannot see that they are committing it" ("The types" 2016: *Ash-Shirk ul-Khafie* [The Hidden *Shirk*]). Muhammad said that hidden or invisible *shirk* "is more hidden than the track of a black ant on a black stone in a dark night" (At-Tamimi 2002: 215; see also Abdul-Wahhab 2002: 141). Muhammad also said, "There is nothing standing between a person and *Shirk* (polytheism) except leaving the prayer, so if he leaves it he has committed *Shirk*" (Ibn Majad: vol. 1, book 5, no. 1080). "Ibn 'Umar heard a man saying: 'No by the Ka'bah' so Ibn 'Umar said: 'Nothing is sworn by other than Allah, for I heard the Messenger of Allah say: 'Whoever swears by other than Allah, he has committed disbelief or *shirk*'" (at-Tirmidhi: 1535; see also Abdul-Wahhab 2002: 145). Q. 57:22 says, "No misfortune can happen on earth or in your souls but is recorded in a decree before We bring it into

¹² Abdul-Wahhab states, "The Companions used to explain that the Verses revealed about major *Shirk* include minor *Shirk* also" (Abdul-Wahhab 2002: 142). If that is the case, then Allah also may never forgive minor *shirk*.

existence: That is truly easy for Allah.” Consistent with that, Ibn Abbas said that *shirk* “is also to say: ‘Had there not been this little dog or the duck in the house, the thief would have entered.’ Or, like the statement of a man to his companion: ‘By Allah’s will and yours will...’ or ‘Had it not been Allah and so-and-so’, etc. Do not mention anybody with Allah because all of it is *Shirk*.” (Abdul-Wahhab 2002: 141). Abdul-Wahhab maintains that “it is *Shirk* to perform a (righteous) deed for worldly reasons” (Ibid.: 129).

Related to *shirk* is disbelief (*kufir*). Athari says there are two kinds of *kufir*: major *kufir* puts a person beyond the pale of Islam and the other kind does not. Major *kufir* is called *kufir* of belief: “This is what goes against faith and nullifies Islam, which dooms a person to abide in Hell forever. It may take the form of beliefs, words or deeds. It is divided into five categories.” (al-Athari 2005: 144) Those five categories are: (1) *Kufir* by disbelief, i.e., believing that the Messengers were false or claiming that Allah permitted or forbade something the person knows is not the case; (2) *Kufir* of arrogantly refusing to follow a truth of Islam even though the person affirms it to be true; (3) *Kufir* of turning away, i.e., neither believing nor disbelieving the Messenger or ignoring the truth; (4) *Kufir* of hypocrisy, i.e., making an outward show of following what the Messenger brought while inwardly rejecting and denying it; (5) *Kufir* of doubt, i.e., having some doubts about the Prophet and hesitancy in following him. (Ibid.: 144-46; see also At-Tamimi 2002: 216-17)

3. Other aspects and implications of the Islamic view of morality and sin. Because Islam’s view of morality is based on compliance with the “detailed code of do’s and don’ts” in the Qur’an and the Hadith, acts of sin that can land one in Hell are virtually endless. In addition to that, Emerick warns, “When our good and our bad deeds are about to be examined, Muhammad said that our prayers will be looked at first. If they are found to be full of deficiencies, then God won’t even look at the rest of our record. Imagine going to court and having all the evidence that exonerates you declared inadmissible because of serious procedural mistakes on your part!” (Emerick 2004: 136)

Finally, *unintentional* acts may be sin, even *shirk*. In one case, Muhammad said, “Allah said: ‘The son of Adam hurts Me by abusing Time, for I am Time’” (al-Bukhari: 7491). Abdul-Wahhab comments, “Abusing *Ad-Dahr* (the time) is in fact to wrong Allah. . . . Something may be an abuse *even if it was not the heartfelt intention (of the abuser).*” (Abdul-Wahhab 2002: 147, *emph. added*) In another case, “Jundub reported that Allah’s Messenger stated that a person said: Allah would not forgive such and such (person). Thereupon Allah the Exalted and Glorious, said: Who is he who adjures about Me that I would not grant pardon to so and so; I have granted pardon to so and so and blotted out his deeds (who took an oath that I would not grant pardon to him).” (Muslim: 2621) Abdul-Wahhab notes that the man who had made the statement had been a faithful worshipper, but “his one statement destroyed his life in this world and the Hereafter. . . . In this *Hadith* it is described that a man sometimes utters a sentence unintentionally but the consequences of that are grave (i.e., severe punishment).” (Abdul-Wahhab 2002: 183)

D. Contrary to its official doctrine, Islam in fact accepts the innate sinfulness of mankind

Islam’s formal doctrine is that human beings are created innocent and our natural tendency is to strive toward good. One therefore would expect at least some persons—especially Muhammad himself—acting in accordance with their supposed “innocence” and “natural tendency” would not sin. That is not the case. Islam in fact recognizes that every human being who lives and who ever has lived, including Muhammad, is a sinner.¹³ Thus, **Q. 35:45** states, “*If Allah were to punish men according to what they deserve. He would not leave on the back of the (earth) a single living creature*” (see also **Q. 16:61; 103:2**).

The universality of sin is not just the result of “external influence and intruding factors” (“The Concept” 2009: n.p.). Instead, contrary to its own professed doctrine that human beings are born pure and are naturally inclined to good, Islam, like Christianity, in fact attributes the universality of human sin to the corrupt internal nature of all human beings. Islamic teaching gives three different reasons for humanity’s innate sinfulness:

1. Human sinfulness is attributed to the way Allah made people from the beginning. Many Qur’anic passages indicate that Allah created human beings with a corrupt or sinful nature: “*Man was created weak*” (**Q. 4:28**); “*Verily, man is given up to injustice and ingratitude*” (**Q. 14:34**; see also **Q. 33:72; 50:16**); “*Man is ever miserly!*” (**Q. 17:100**, Hilali-Khan); “*Truly man was created very impatient*” (**Q. 70:19**); “*And violent is he in his love of wealth*” (**Q. 100:8**). “*And [by] the soul and He who proportioned it and inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness*” (**Q. 91:7-8**, Sahih).¹⁴ In commenting on this very passage, Muhammad clarified that Allah is the one who inspired (i.e., “breathed in”) sin into the human soul: “Consider the soul and

¹³ The one exception to this is Jesus Christ.

¹⁴ Note that the portions of these verses in brackets are interpretations added by the translator and are not in the original wording. When they are removed, the verses indicate that it is Allah who inspired in man’s soul its wickedness.

Him Who made it perfect, then *breathed into it its sin and its piety*” (Muslim: 2650, *emph. added*). Muhammad also said, “Allah fixed the very portion of adultery which a man will indulge in. There would be no escape from it.” (Muslim: 2658a; see also al-Bukhari: 6243; al-Nawawi, *Riyad*: book 18, no. 112) The Qur’an and the Hadith confirm that sinfulness is an integral part of humanity’s nature *as created by Allah*. In **Q. 2:30**, when Allah proposed to make human beings a viceregent on earth the angels responded, “*Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood?*” That response indicates that the angels were aware, *even before any actual sin had been committed*, that sin was inevitable because of humanity’s sinful, created nature. Ibn Kathir admits, “The angels knew of this fact, according to their understanding of human nature” (Ibn Kathir 2003: Q. 2:30, comment). “When Allah fashioned Adam in Paradise, He left him as He liked him to leave. Then Iblis roamed round him to see what actually that was and when he found him hollow from within, he recognised that he had been *created with a disposition that he would not have control over himself*.” (Muslim: 2611a, *emph. added*) Thus, **Q. 12:53** affirms that the natural state of all humans is *not* prone to good, but is prone to evil: “*Nor do I absolve my own self (of blame): the (human) soul is certainly prone to evil, unless my Lord do bestow His Mercy.*” Hilali-Khan translates it as “*Verily, the (human) self is inclined to evil.*”

Q. 18:60-82 tells a strange story of Moses meeting a prophet known as Al-Khidr on whom Allah had bestowed mercy and knowledge (**Q. 18:65**). **Q. 18:74** (Hilali-Khan) says, “*Then they both proceeded, till they met a boy, he (Khidr) killed him. Musa (Moses) said: ‘Have you killed an innocent person who had killed none? Verily, you have committed a thing “Nukra” (a great Munkar - prohibited, evil, dreadful thing)!’*” In a hadith, Muhammad tried to justify this murder by saying, “The young man whom Khadir killed was a non-believer *by his very nature* and had he survived he would have involved his parents in defiance and unbelief” (Muslim: 2662a, *emph. added*).¹⁵ Khan quotes a poem by the first caliph, Muhammad’s closest companion Abu Bakr, “O God, how shall I be saved, for there is no goodness in me? I am overwhelmed with iniquities, but am wanting in goodness.” (Khan 1992: 17) Suhaym states that repentance lets a person “know his real self, that it is inclined to evil” and “enables him to know that he is full of faults and defects” (As-Suhaym 2006: 217, 218).

2. Human sinfulness is attributable to Adam and Eve’s sin which affected their progeny. Islam appears to have its own version of the “fall” of mankind. **Q. 33:72** states, “*We did indeed offer the Trust to the Heavens and the Earth and the Mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof: but man undertook it; - He was indeed unjust and foolish.*” Yusuf Ali comments on this, “The Heavens, the Earth, and the Mountains, *i.e.*, other creatures of Allah, besides man, refused to undertake a Trust or a responsibility, and may be imagined as happy without a choice of good or evil being given through their will. In saying that they refused, we imply a will, but we limit it by the statement that they did not undertake to be given a choice between good and evil. They preferred to submit their will entirely to Allah’s Will, which is All-Wise and Perfect, and which would give them far more happiness than a faculty of choice, with their imperfect knowledge. Man was too audacious and ignorant to realise this, and the result has been that man as a race has been disrupted.” (Ali 2002: Q. 33:72n.3779) From this, one can infer that humanity originally was uncorrupted but through sin has become corrupted, *i.e.*, “fallen.”

Other Qur’anic passages and ahadith directly tie mankind’s “fall” to Adam and Eve’s sin in the Garden, just as the Bible relates. **Q. 2:35-36** says, “*We said: ‘O Adam! dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden; and eat of the bountiful things therein as (where and when) ye will; but approach not this tree, or ye run into harm and transgression.’ Then did Satan make them slip from the (garden), and get them out of the state (of felicity) in which they had been. We said: ‘Get ye down, all (ye people), with enmity between yourselves. On earth will be your dwelling-place and your means of livelihood - for a time’*” (see also **Q. 7:22-25; 20:117-23**) Gilchrist points out that “the key word here is *ahbituu* which comes from the root word *habt* meaning to go down an incline or to descend from a high place to a low one. ‘Fall down!’ was the order, literally ‘Get out of here!’” (Gilchrist 2002: 101; see also “Quran Dictionary” 2009-2017: Q. 2:26, *ih’biṭū*) Even though Allah forgave

¹⁵ This is no justification at all. The boy had done nothing wrong. To murder someone for a crime he has not yet committed is unjust by any standard—except, apparently, Islam’s. *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* even states that “they met a boy, *who had not yet reached puberty*, playing with [other] boys, among whom his face was the fairest—and he, al-Khidr, slew him, by slitting his throat with a knife while he lay down, or by tearing his head off with his hand, or by smashing his head against a wall” (Jalal 2013: Q. 18:74, comment, *emph. added*). Since the boy had not reached puberty, according to Islam’s official doctrine he was in his natural state of purity or fitrah and thereby sinless. The operative fact in this story, according to Muhammad, is that the boy was a non-believer, which evidently is a sufficient ground to murder someone. Al-Khidr’s own reason for murdering the boy is even more outrageous: “*And as for the boy, his parents were believers, and we feared lest he should oppress them by rebellion and disbelief*” (**Q. 18:80**). According to Al-Khidr, the innocent boy was the child of good Muslim parents, and he only “feared” that the boy would become rebellious and an unbeliever! Any way one looks at it, this story reveals an ugly and violent side of Islam.

Adam and Eve (**Q. 2:37; 20:122**), he never let them back into the garden.

Further, Adam and Eve's "fall" affected not only themselves but their progeny as well. In other words, in addition to accepting the doctrine of the "fall" of mankind, Islam also *does* accept the doctrine of "original sin." We know this because Allah's punishment of Adam and Eve condemned all of Adam and Eve's progeny to the same exclusion from the garden—despite the fact that they supposedly are born in a state of purity, *fitrah*, and sinlessness. Note that Allah's command in **Q. 2:36** encompassed "all" people, not "both." Thus, in some sense all of humanity was "in Adam," just as Christianity maintains. As a result, "God declared that humans would have discord and hatred for each other from now on because of the inherent struggle to survive in the world" (Emerick 2004: 94). Tabari's *History* states, "When God settled Adam and his spouse in His Paradise, He permitted them to eat of whatever fruit they wished, except the fruit of one tree. This was to afflict them and have God's judgement on them *and their progeny* come to pass [citing **Q. 2:35**]." (al-Tabari 1989: 275, *emph. added*.)

Additionally, Allah's punishment included being able to live on the earth only "*for a time*" (**Q. 2:36**). In his comment on this ayah, Ibn Kathir points out that "*for a time*" means "limited life" (Ibn Kathir 2003: **Q. 2:36**, comment). Thus, human death is the result of Adam and Eve's sin. One Muslim writer uses this analogy concerning Adam and Eve's sin and Allah's punishment: "As for the consequences of the sin of Adam, which was his extradition from the Garden, this was felt by those to come after him and this is only natural. If one was to become drunk and have a car accident, and some of the passengers die, the sin of driver effects [sic.] the passengers in their death." (Abdulsalam 2006: *The Divine Will*)¹⁶ By visiting the results and punishments of Adam and Eve on their offspring, Adam and Eve's sin was disastrous not only for themselves but for everyone who followed after them—exactly as the doctrines of original sin and the fall of man state.

In the Hadith, Muhammad explicitly articulated the doctrine of original sin. In connection with the final judgment he said, "Allah, the Blessed and Exalted, would gather people. The believers would stand till the Paradise would be brought near them. They would come to Adam and say: 'O our father, open for us the Paradise.' He would say: 'What turned ye out from the Paradise was the sin of your father Adam.'" (Muslim: 195; see also al-Bukhari: 6614; see also 3409, 7515, vol. 6, book 60, no. 260, 262; Muslim: 2643a, 2652a, b, c; Abi Dawud: 4701, 4702; an-Nawawi, *Riyad*: book 1, no. 201) Elsewhere, Muhammad similarly applied the concept that sin is imputed to others: "No person who is killed unjustly, but the share of (this offence of his also) falls upon the first son of Adam, for he was the first to introduce killing" (Muslim: 1677a; see also al-Bukhari: 3335, 6867, 7321; at-Tirmidhi: 2673; an-Nasa'i: 3985; Ibn Majah: vol. 3, book 21, no. 2616).¹⁷ Thus, although Islam formally denies the doctrines of original sin and the fall of mankind, in fact it teaches both doctrines.

3. Human sinfulness is attributable directly to Allah. We saw above that the Qur'an and the Hadith teach that Allah created people with a corrupt, sinful nature. Creating people in such a state is not all Allah has done to make sure that every human being sins. **Q. 4:88** (Hilali-Khan) states that Allah is the one who actually causes people to go astray without hope or remedy: "*Do you want to guide him whom Allah has made to go astray? And he whom Allah has made to go astray, you will never find for him any way (of guidance).*" **Q. 14:4** (Hilali-Khan) adds, "*Allah misleads whom He wills and guides whom He wills*" (see also **Q. 16:93**). In the Hadith Muhammad said, "There is no heart that is not between two of the Fingers of the Most Merciful. If He wills, He guides it and if He wills, He sends it astray." (Ibn Majah: vol. 1, book 1, no. 199; see also 3834; Muslim: 2655; at-Tirmidhi: 3522) In a similar hadith, Muhammad's companion, Anas bin Maalik said, "'O Prophet of Allah! We believe in you and what you have come with, but do you fear for us?' He said: 'Yes. Indeed the hearts are between two Fingers of Allah's Fingers, He changes them as He wills.'" (at-Tirmidhi: vol. 4, book 6, no. 2140)

Allah also actively guarantees that those who go astray and will fall further into sin. First, Allah himself caused Satan to sin: "*Then Satan said, 'Because you have made me go astray, I shall certainly try to seduce people into straying from the right path'*" (**Q. 7:16**, Sarwar); Arberry translates it "*Now, for Thy perverting me . . .*" Second, Allah attaches demons to people as intimate companions: "*If anyone withdraws himself from remembrance of (Allah) Most Gracious, We appoint for him an evil one, to be an intimate companion to him. Such (evil ones) really hinder them from the Path, but they think that they are being guided aright!*" (**Q. 43:36-37**) Additionally, Allah guarantees that the demons will be effective because, as Muhammad said, "The devils do not lead anyone astray by their temptation except the one whom Allah destined to go to Hell" (Abi Dawud:

¹⁶ Abdulsalam goes on to say, "That does not mean that the passengers are to be held to account for the sin of the driver" (Abdulsalam 2006: *The Divine Will*). Although that is true in one sense, the essence of the doctrine of original sin refers to the *result* of Adam and Eve's sin for their progeny, just as the passengers bear the result of the drunk driver's accident.

¹⁷ This is, indeed, original sin: "If I kill today, I do it by my own choice also [as did Cain]. In other words, I did not kill because Cain killed, but I sinned (by killing), because sin started with Cain. Cain's capacity for sin became our inheritance, or as Muhammad put it, we *share* the sin of Cain." (Prince 2011: 53, *emph. in orig.*)

4614). The Hadith also confirms that Allah's purpose and pleasure in creating human beings was that they sin. Muhammad said, "If you were not to commit sins, Allah would have swept you out of existence and would have replaced you by another people who have committed sin, and then asked forgiveness from Allah, and He would have granted them pardon" (Muslim: 2748b; see also 2749).

E. Salvation according to Islam

Just as Islam has internally inconsistent positions regarding the nature of humanity and the cause of sin, it likewise has inconsistent positions concerning how people can be saved or rescued from their sins and go to Paradise instead of Hell. There are at least three conflicting lines of teaching concerning how people are saved from Hell and go to Paradise: (1) Balancing one's good deeds against bad deeds; (2) Allah's simply choosing to forgive someone for reasons of his own, regardless of one's works; and (3) Allah's pre-decree whereby some have been eternally predestined to Paradise and some eternally predestined to Hell.

1. Salvation is a balancing of one's works. **Q. 53:39** (Hilali-Khan) states the basic "self-salvation" philosophy of Islam: "*Man can have nothing but what he does (good or bad).*" **Q. 2:281** warns that one should "*fear the Day when ye shall be brought back to Allah. Then shall every soul be paid what it earned, and none shall be dealt with unjustly.*" The Qur'an has dozens of verses that say that Allah's favor at the final judgment will be on those who "*believe and work righteousness*" (e.g., **Q. 10:4; 11:23; 14:23; 17:9; 18:30, 46; 20:75, 82, 112; 22:14, 23, 50, 56; 28:67, 80; 32:19-20; 99:6-8**). Suhaym states, "The believer in Allah will have certain knowledge that there is no way to success and salvation except through good deeds that please Allah" (As-Suhaym 2006: 179). The Qur'an also compares the judgment to scales in which good deeds will be weighed against bad deeds: "*The balance that day will be true (to nicety): those whose scale (of good) will be heavy, will prosper: Those whose scale will be light, will be their souls in perdition, for that they wrongfully treated Our signs.*" (**Q. 7:8-9**; see also **Q. 21:47; 101:6-9; 23:101-03**).

The situation is not quite as simple as the balancing of the scales might imply. The Qur'an says that on judgment day *all people* and all demons first will be *sent to Hell*; only later will some be saved out of Hell: "*Does not man remember that We created him before, while he was nothing? So by your Lord, surely, We shall gather them together, and (also) the Shayatin (devils) (with them), then We shall bring them round Hell on their knees. Then indeed We shall drag out from every sect all those who were worst in obstinate rebellion against the Most Beneficent (Allah). Then, verily, We know best those who are most worthy of being burnt therein. There is not one of you but will pass over it (Hell); this is with your Lord; a Decree which must be accomplished. Then We shall save those who use to fear Allah and were dutiful to Him. And We shall leave the Zalimun (polytheists and wrongdoers, etc.) therein (humbled) to their knees (in Hell).*" (**Q. 19:67-72**, Hilali-Khan)

That is not all. Emerick says that people "whether guilty or innocent, will have to take a harrowing journey over a bridge called the *Sirat*, which spans the chasm of Hell and leads to Paradise on the other side. The *Sirat* is as thin as a razor and is studded with jagged edges and spikes." (Emerick 2004: 73-74) Several ahadith discuss this: "Allah will call them, and As-Sirat (a bridge) will be laid across Hell and I (Muhammad) shall be the first amongst the Apostles to cross it with my followers. Nobody except the Apostles will then be able to speak and they will be saying then, 'O Allah! Save us. O Allah Save us.' There will be hooks like the thorns of Sa'dan in Hell. . . . These hooks will be like the thorns of Sa'dan but nobody except Allah knows their greatness in size and these will entangle the people according to their deeds; some of them will fall and stay in Hell forever; others will receive punishment (torn into small pieces) and will get out of Hell, till when Allah intends mercy on whomever He likes amongst the people of Hell, He will order the angels to take out of Hell those who worshipped none but Him alone. The angels will take them out by recognizing them from the traces of prostrations, for Allah has forbidden the (Hell) fire to eat away those traces. So they will come out of the Fire, it will eat away from the whole of the human body except the marks of the prostrations. At that time they will come out of the Fire as mere skeletons. The Water of Life will be poured on them and as a result they will grow like the seeds growing on the bank of flowing water. (al-Bukhari: 806; see also 6573, 7437, 7438; see also Muslim: 195; an-Nawawi, *Riyad*: book 1, no. 201)

In yet another hadith on the same subject, Muhammad amazingly states that "when the believers pass safely over (the bridge across) Hell, they will be stopped at a bridge in between Hell and Paradise where they will retaliate upon each other for the injustices done among them in the world, and when they get purified of all their sins, they will be admitted into Paradise. By Him in Whose Hands the life of Muhammad is everybody will recognize his dwelling in Paradise better than he recognizes his dwelling in this world." (al-Bukhari: 2440) Almost unbelievably, the people "are cleansed and purified (through the retaliation)" (al-Bukhari: 6535).

2. Salvation is Allah's choosing to forgive, regardless of one's works. In conflict with the above bizarre method of judgment and salvation, multiple other Islamic authorities divorce one's deeds from salvation. For

example, in the Hadith, Muhammad said, “None amongst you can get into Paradise by virtue of his deeds alone. They said: Allah’s Messenger, not even you? Thereupon he said: Not even I, but that Allah should wrap me in His Grace and Mercy.” (Muslim: 2816f; see also 2816a, b, c, d, e, g, 2817c, 2818a; al-Bukhari: 5673, 6463, 6464, 6467; Ibn Majah: vol. 5, book 37, no. 4201)

This line of authority cites the statements at the beginning of every Qur’anic surah except surah 9 that Allah is called “the Beneficent, the Merciful.” Many verses call on people to repent and ask for Allah to forgive their sins. For example: “*Allah accept the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance and repent soon afterwards; to them will Allah turn in mercy: For Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom*” (Q. 4:17); “*But any that (in this life) had repented, believed, and worked righteousness, will have hopes to be among those who achieve salvation*” (Q. 28:67; see also Q. 3:16-17; 47:19; 48:1-2). Emerick cites the case of Adam and Eve: “Islam states that after a while God had mercy on the repentant and humbled pair and taught them how to ask for His forgiveness. Then, when they implored God for His grace, guess what? He forgave them. End of story.” (Emerick 2004: 94)

Nevertheless, salvation by one’s repenting and asking for Allah’s forgiveness is problematic for at least two reasons:

- First, forgiveness does not cancel the effects of sin and God’s judgment of sin. “It is true that God, out of His bounteous love, has willed that man be saved. How? Is it through repentance? But repentance cannot overrule judgement and, consequently, lift punishment because this would not meet the demands of God’s justice. It is true that while repentance stands between the repenting person and the committal of further sin, it does not eradicate the effect of preceding sin and the judgement of God therein.” (Jadeed 1996-2019: 11) Islam has no provision for the penalty of sin being paid for like Christ did on the cross. Ghabril discusses this inherent problem within Islam: “Heaven or paradise, which men aspire to enter, is a pure spot where only the purified and those made righteous can enter. Thus he who commits one sin has transgressed and become[s] unclean. . . . Suppose a Muslim is dressed in a white robe and while on his way to prayer a speck of dirt fell on his robe or person. Wouldn’t he be considered unclean? If that was his state wouldn’t he have to return and purify himself to be able to start prayer? This is the state of man towards God in respect to purity and impurity.” (Ghabril 2003: 24) He adds, “While it is true [Allah] can do as he pleases, yet he would not will what denies his original attributes and his divine law. Supposing the judge pardoned your brother’s murderer after his crime was proved, then went on to forgive him. Would you regard him as being just? Not at all! You would regard him as unjust because he violated the law.” (Ghabril 2003: 24)
- Second, forgiveness is neither automatic nor guaranteed. The Qur’an says that Allah may or may not accept one’s repentance: “*Others (there are who) have acknowledged their wrong-doings: they have mixed an act that was good with another that was evil. Perhaps Allah will turn unto them (in Mercy): for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.*” (Q. 9:102, *emph. added*); “*And to Allah belongs all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth. He forgives whom He wills, and punishes whom He wills.*” (Q. 3:129, Hilali-Khan; see also Q. 2:284); “*Allah forgiveth not (The sin of) joining other gods with Him; but He forgiveth whom He pleaseth other sins than this*” (Q. 4:116; see also Q. 5:8; 48:14). Athari says that if a person dies having committed a sin “for which there is no evidence that committing it constitutes *kufr* [unbelief]—then his case rests with Allah: if He wills, He will punish him, and if He wills, He will forgive him” (al-Athari 2005: 141).

Allah chooses to forgive or not forgive for reasons only he knows; what he may choose to do is completely unpredictable. For example, one hadith says, “He [Allah] laughs at two men, one of whom killed the other, then they both entered Paradise” (an-Nasa’i: 3165). On the other hand, another hadith says, “The Messenger of Allah said: If anyone who is sexual defiled leaves a spot equal to the breadth of a hair without washing, such and such an amount of Hell-fire will have to be suffered for it” (Abi Dawud: 249). Are we to conclude from this that an unwashed spot no larger than the breadth of a hair is more serious to Allah than murder? Further, as we saw above, Allah’s “forgiveness” of Adam and Eve is at best only partial: (1) he never let them back into paradise from which he had expelled them; (2) they were condemned to a life of enmity, discord, and hatred between themselves; (3) they were doomed to die as a consequence of their sin; and (4) their children and all others who would follow after them were consigned to share the same fate as they themselves had to bear.

3. Salvation is determined by Allah’s pre-decree. Another line of Islamic authority divorces salvation both from one’s works and from Allah’s choice to forgive or not forgive but places one’s eternal destiny solely in Allah’s pre-existing decree. We noted in the first chapter that the sixth of Islam’s six articles of belief (*imam*) is belief in Allah’s pre-decree, namely, everything that happens in the universe, both good and bad, faith and unbelief, happens by the will and decree of Allah, and Allah does whatever he wills. For example, Q. 28:68

(Hilali-Khan) says, “Your Lord creates whatsoever He wills and chooses, no choice have they (in any matter). Glorified be Allah, and exalted above all that they associate as partners (with Him).” **Q. 16:93**: “If Allah so willed, He could make you all one people: But He leaves straying whom He pleases, and He guides whom He pleases.” (See also **Q. 4:88**) Ahadith confirm this: “I heard the Messenger of Allah saying: Verily the first of what Allah created was the Pen. He said to it: Write. So it wrote what will be forever.” (at-Tirmidhi: vol. 5, book 44, no. 3319; see also Abi Dawud: 4700).

Allah’s pre-decree specifically includes decreeing and creating some to go to Paradise and some to Hell: “Many are the Jinns and men we have made for Hell” (**Q. 7:179**); “If We had so willed, We could certainly have brought every soul its true guidance: but the Word from Me will come true, ‘I will fill Hell with Jinns and men all together’” (**Q. 32:13**; see also **Q. 11:118-19**).

Multiple ahadith confirm this: “Allah created people for Paradise, He created them for it when they were still in their father’s loins, And He has created people for Hell, He created them for it when they were still in their fathers’ loins” (Ibn Majah: vol. 1, book 1, no. 82; see also Muslim: 2662b, c; Abi Dawud: 4713; an-Nasa’i: 1947). In fact, the *Mishkat* relates an amazing hadith that not only addresses Allah’s eternal pre-decree but also reveals his arbitrariness, his uncaring nature, and his racism. Muhammad said, “Allah created Adam when He created him. Then He stroke his right shoulder and took out a white race as if they were seeds, and He stroke his left shoulder and took out a black race as if they were coals. Then He said to those who were on his right side: Towards Paradise and I don’t care. He said to those who were on his left shoulder: Towards the fire and I don’t care.” (Al-Tabrizi 1939: 3:117-18, no. 454w)¹⁸

Finally, despite Islam’s official doctrine that a child is in a state of sinlessness until puberty, because of Allah’s pre-decree even children younger than the age of puberty cannot be sure of salvation: “The Messenger of Allah was called to lead the funeral prayer of a child of the Ansar. I said: Allah’s Messenger, there is happiness for this child who is a bird from the birds of Paradise for it committed no sin nor has he reached the age when one can commit sin. He said: ‘A’isha, per adventure, it may be otherwise, because God created for Paradise those who are fit for it while they were yet in their father’s loins and created for Hell those who are to go to Hell. He created them for Hell while they were yet in their father’s loins.” (Muslim: 2662c; see also Ibn Majah: vol. 1, book 1, no. 82)

4. The issue of intercession. As noted above, Islam teaches that everyone must bear the burden of his or her own sins (**Q. 6:164; 7:23; 17:15; 39:53; 53:38**). The corollary is that no one is able to intercede for another at the judgment. Thus, the Qur’an says, “Then will no intercession of (any) intercessors profit them” (**Q. 74:48**) and “Guard yourselves against a day when one soul shall not avail another nor shall intercession be accepted for her, nor shall compensation be taken from her, nor shall anyone be helped (from outside)” (**Q. 2:48**; see also **Q. 2:254; 4:109, 123; 6:51, 70; 16:111; 31:33; 40:18, 40-41**). The Qur’an specifies that even Muhammad cannot intercede: “Whether thou [Muhammad] ask for their forgiveness, or not, (their sin is unforgivable): if thou ask seventy times for their forgiveness, Allah will not forgive them: because they have rejected Allah and His Messenger: and Allah guideth not those who are perversely rebellious.” (**Q. 9:80**; see also **Q. 39:19**) In the Hadith, Muhammad admitted that he could not do anything to save even his own tribe or family, including his daughter, mother, and father: “When Allah revealed the Verse: ‘Warn your nearest kinsmen,’ Allah’s Messenger got up and said, ‘O people of Quraish (or said similar words)! Buy (i.e. save) yourselves (from the Hellfire) as I cannot save you from Allah’s Punishment; O Bani ‘Abd Manaf! I cannot save you from Allah’s Punishment, O Safiya, the Aunt of Allah’s Messenger! I cannot save you from Allah’s Punishment; O Fatima bint Muhammad! Ask me anything from my wealth, but I cannot save you from Allah’s Punishment.’” (al-Bukhari: 2753; see also an-Nasa’i: 3644, 3646, 3647, 3648; at-Tirmidhi: vol. 5, book 44, no. 3185) Muhammad also said, “I sought permission to beg forgiveness for my mother, but He [Allah] did not grant it to me” (Muslim: 976a; see also 976b; Ibn Majah: vol. 1, book 6, no. 1572; an-Nasa’i: 2034; Abi Dawud: 3234), and “A man asked: where is my father, Messenger of Allah? He replied! Your father is in Hell. When he turned his back, he said: My father and your father are in Hell.” (Abi Dawud: 4718)

However, just as Islam sets forth conflicting bases for salvation, it also inconsistently allows for intercession at the judgment. The Qur’an opens the possibility of intercession by stating, “To Allah belongs exclusively (the right to grant) intercession: to Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth” (**Q.**

¹⁸ Muhammad himself owned and sold a number of Africans as slaves (al-Bukhari: 2468, 5191, 6161, 7263, vol. 6, book 60, no. 435; Muslim: 1602, 2323a; Ibn Majah: vol. 4, book 24, no. 2869; an-Nasa’i: 3728; 4184, 4621; at-Tirmidhi: 1239, 1596). Muhammad even mocked how Africans look: “Allah’s Messenger said, ‘You should listen to and obey, your ruler even if he was an Ethiopian (black) slave whose head looks like a raisin’” (al-Bukhari: 7142, emph. added; Ibn Majah: vol. 4, book 24, no. 2860). In light of the hadith recorded in the *Mishkat* and these ahadith, it is incredible that any African or person of African heritage would become a Muslim.

39:44; see also Q. 2:255; 10:3; 19:87). Angels are said to intercede for the forgiveness of those on the earth (Q. 40:7; 42:5). Q. 43:86 contradicts the “no intercession” passages by saying, “*And those whom they invoke besides Allah have no power of intercession;— only he who bears witness to the Truth, and they know (him).*” Many Muslim commentators take this to be a reference to Muhammad as having the exclusive ability to intercede (see Ali 2006: Q. 43:86n.4683). In popular Islam, Muhammad’s image “has taken on messianic proportions and, while all Muslims will boldly state that they worship Allah alone and that their prophet was only a faithful messenger, it is obvious that his status in the world of Islam is such as to place him almost as an essential mediator between Allah and his people” (Gilchrist 1994: 121). While emphasizing Muhammad’s intercessory role, the Hadith adopts intercession virtually without restriction. Despite being unable to effectively intercede even for his own family, Muhammad portrays himself as the greatest intercessor: “I shall be pre-eminent amongst the descendants of Adam on the Day of Resurrection and I will be the first intercessor and the first whose intercession will be accepted (by Allah)” (Muslim: 2278; see also al-Bukhari: 7510; Abi Dawud 4673; Ibn Majah: vol. 5, book 37, no. 4308).

F. Implications of sin and salvation according to Islam

Just as the Christian view of the nature of humanity, sin, and salvation through the person and sacrifice of Christ have important implications, so the Islamic view of humanity, sin, and the ways of salvation have important implications. The internal contradictions of Islam may pull Muslims in conflicting directions, as the first two implications show.

1. Muslims have no coherent basis to fight against evil and may be driven to passivity and despair.

While one strain of Islamic thought teaches both the “fall” of mankind and the doctrine of “original sin,” official Islamic teaching denies both of those doctrines. By denying the fall of mankind, Islam therefore must see the world as Allah intends it to be. Further, the overwhelming teaching of Islam is Allah’s predestination and *direct* control of and involvement in everything, including evil. This emphasis on Allah’s pre-decree can lead to passivity and even despair. The *Mishkat* recounts that Abu Abdullah, one of Muhammad’s own companions, was reduced to weeping when he recalled that Muhammad had said, “Allah caught one hold with His right hand and another with another hand, and said: ‘This is for this, and this is for this, and I don’t care.’ I don’t know in which of the two holds I am.” (Al-Tabrizi 1939: 3:118, no. 455w) Karim comments, “Those who were in His right hand would go to Paradise and those in His left hand would go to Hell. The narrator feared in which of the hands of Allah he fell as that would decide his fate.” (Karim 1939: 3:118n.1563) If even Muhammad was unsure of his eternal destination and his own companion was reduced to weeping because of uncertainty over his fate, it is not surprising that others might simply conclude that any efforts they make are worthless and resign themselves to their fate.

Paradoxically, the utter comprehensiveness of the Qur’an and Hadith, coupled with the commands not to question anything in the Qur’an and the threat of Hell for all who engage in *bid’ah* (innovation), can induce the same passivity. For example, Muhammad said, “Whoever introduces an innovation (Bid’ah) with which Allah and his Messenger are not pleased, he will have a (burden of) sin equivalent to that of those among the people who act upon it, without that detracting from their sins in the slightest” (Ibn Majah: vol. 1, book 1, no. 210; see also vol. 1, book 1, no. 14, 42, 45, 50). The practical implications of this are summarized by Bernard Lewis in his book *What Went Wrong?* Despite the great numerical growth of Islam, “it became abundantly clear in the Middle East and indeed all over the lands of Islam that things had gone badly wrong. Compared with its millennial rival, Christendom, the world of Islam had become poor, weak, and ignorant. In the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the primacy and therefore the dominance of the West was clear for all to see.” (Lewis 2002: 151) As Sundiata states, this worldview “is responsible for the Muslims’ lack of determination to improve their situation; they think that their situation is exactly ‘as Allah wills’ and have therefore neither the power nor the permission to interfere with the fate Allah has fixed for them. The Islamic mind-set stifles the human desire to learn how things and situations work and how they may be made to work; it discourages Muslims from learning about other people, places, and things.” (Sundiata 2006: 214)

2. **Many Muslims are driven to fanaticism, terror, and jihad.** Emerick alleges that “Allah rewards us according to the amount of our good deeds. It’s a kind of religious capitalism with results that can only make life better for everyone.” (Emerick 2004: 36) While the prospect of earning one’s salvation can be an incentive for doing good deeds, recall that Islam’s *definition* of what constitutes “good deeds” is not based on any universally-acknowledged morality but on the specific commands and prohibitions of the Qur’an and the Hadith. Therein lies the problem, for Muslims “do not regard anyone as a friend or an enemy except on the basis of religion” (al-Athari 2005: 58). Q. 60:1 (Hilali-Khan) says, “*O you who believe! Take not My enemies and your enemies (i.e. disbelievers and polytheists, etc.) as friends, showing affection towards them. . . . If you have*

come forth to strive in My Cause and to seek My Good Pleasure, (then take not these disbelievers and polytheists, etc., as your friends). You show friendship to them in secret, while I am All-Aware of what you conceal and what you reveal. And whosoever of you (Muslims) does that, then indeed he has gone (far) astray, (away) from the Straight Path” (see also **Q. 3:28, 118; 4:89, 144; 5:51; 9:23; 58:22**). Thus, Shaikh Abdullah bin Baz states, “A true believer loves the believers and takes them for friends, and shows hate towards disbelievers and does not take them for friends” (bin Baz 2002: 266; see also bin Jamil Zino n.d.: 317, “Seeking the friendship and help of the disbelievers is not permitted” and “a *Wali* [friend] is a true believer, who fears and loves Allah very much”).

Violating this command has eternal consequences. Tamimi says that one thing which “negates *Tauhid*” [and thereby guarantees consignment to Hell since *tauhid* is the foundational Islamic doctrine that Allah is One] is “befriending disbelievers and hypocrites by glorifying and honoring them. This includes addressing them with the title *Saiyid* (sir), receiving them with greetings of respect and loving them.” (At-Tamimi 2002: 238) This even includes one’s own family: “*Thou wilt not find any people who believe in Allah and the Last Day, loving those who resist Allah and His Messenger, even though they were their fathers or their sons, or their brothers, or their kindred*” (**Q. 58:22**). **Q. 48:29** (Hilali-Khan) goes beyond that and says, “*Muhammad (SAW) is the Messenger of Allah, and those who are with him are severe against disbelievers, and merciful among themselves*” (see also **Q. 5:54; 66:9**). **Q. 9:29** goes beyond that, commanding Muslims to “*Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued*” (see also **Q. 2:191, 216; 4:89; 9:5, 123**).

These commands raise the issue of *jihad*. The root from which the word *jihad* is derived occurs 41 times in the Qur’an in different forms; its basic meaning is “to strive” (“Quran Dictionary” 2009-2017: **Q. 160:1, jihādān**). There are a few “peaceful” applications of *jihad* in the Qur’an (see **Q. 22:78**) and the Hadith (see al-Bukhari: 2784; 2787). Nevertheless, although Muhammad used the term *jihad* in both spiritual (peaceful) and physical (warfare) contexts, he strongly emphasized physical *jihad*. “The peaceful practice of Islam hinges on later, often Western, interpretations of Muhammad’s teaching, whereas the more violent variations of Islam are deeply rooted in orthodoxy and history” (Qureshi 2016: 116). In fact, David Cook states, “In reading Muslim literature—both contemporary and classical—one can see that the evidence for the primacy of spiritual *jihad* is negligible. Today it is certain that no Muslim writing, in a non-Western language (such as Arabic, Persian, Urdu), would ever make claims that *jihad* is primarily nonviolent or has been superseded by spiritual *jihad*. Such claims are made solely by Western scholars, primarily those who study Sufism and/or work in interfaith dialogue, and by Muslim apologists who are trying to present Islam in the most innocuous manner possible.” (Cook 2005: 165-66)

The centrality of *jihad* in Islam is pointed out by Hilali and Khan; in commenting on **Q. 2:190**, they state, “*Al-Jihad* (holy fighting) in Allah’s Cause (with full force of numbers and weaponry) is given the utmost importance in Islam and is one of its pillars (on which it stands). By *Jihad* Islam is established. . . . By abandoning *Jihad* (may Allah protect us from that) Islam is destroyed and Muslims fall into an inferior position; their honour is lost, their lands are stolen, their rule and authority vanish. *Jihad* is an obligatory duty in Islam on every Muslim, and he who tries to escape from this duty, or does not in his innermost heart wish to fulfill this duty, dies with one of the qualities of a hypocrite.” (Hilali and Khan 1998: 39n.1) Lest one think these commands no longer apply or are optional, a recent commentary on **Q. 2:193** (“*And fight them on until there is no more Tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in Allah*”) states, “The worst sins are Infidelity (*Kufr*) and polytheism (*shirk*) which constitute rebellion against Allah, The Creator. To eradicate these, Muslims are required to wage war until there exists none of it in the world, and the only religion is that of Allah.” (Madani 2005: 1:235; see also Darussalam 2002b: 316 [*“Jihad* (fighting and struggle in the cause of Allah) with one’s wealth, and strength, according to one’s ability *is obligatory in Islam,*” emph. added])

These commands are corroborated in the Hadith. Muhammad said, “I have been commanded to fight against people, till they testify to the fact that there is no god but Allah, and believe in me (that) I am the messenger (from the Lord) and in all that I have brought” (Muslim: 21b; see also Muslim: 22; al-Bukhari: 25). That command was not limited to Muhammad but applies to all Muslims for all time. In other ahadith he said, “You will fight against the Jews and you will kill them until even a stone would say: Come here, Muslim, there is a Jew (hiding himself behind me); kill him.” (Muslim: 2921a) Also, “I heard the Messenger of Allah (May peace be upon him) say: Towards the end of the time there will be people who are young in age and from Islam as an arrow goes through the animal aimed at, and their faith will not pass their throats. Wherever you meet them kill them, for their killing will bring a reward for him who kills them on the day of Resurrection.” (Abi Dawud: 4767) In fact, when the Khazraj tribe was swearing allegiance to Muhammad, the person administering

the oath said, “In swearing allegiance to him you are pledging yourselves to wage war against all mankind” (al-Tabari 1988: 134).

The Qur’an says that Allah prefers those who fight over those who stay at home, and promises much greater rewards for the fighters (Q. 4:95; see also Q. 61:4). Additionally, special incentives are given in the Qur’an and the Hadith to participate in jihad to the death. Q. 47:4-6 says, “*Therefore, when ye meet the Unbelievers (in fight), smite at their necks; At length, when ye have thoroughly subdued them, bind a bond firmly (on them): thereafter (is the time for) either generosity or ransom: Until the war lays down its burdens. Thus (are ye commanded): but if it had been Allah’s Will, He could certainly have exacted retribution from them (Himself); but (He lets you fight) in order to test you, some with others. But those who are slain in the Way of Allah,- He will never let their deeds be lost. Soon will He guide them and improve their condition, and admit them to the Garden which He has announced for them.*” (See also Q. 9:88-89) In the Hadith, “Allah’s Messenger said, ‘Allah guarantees to the person who carries out Jihad for His Cause and nothing compelled him to go out but the Jihad in His Cause, and belief in His Words, that He will either admit him into Paradise or return him with his reward or the booty he has earned to his residence from where he went out.’” (al-Bukhari: 7457; see also 36, 3123, 4046, 7463) Further, “Whoever fights in the cause of Allah, the Mighty and Sublime, for the length of time between two milkings of a she-camel, Paradise is guaranteed for him.” (an-Nasa’i: 3141)¹⁹

Islam also has a “the end justifies the means” approach to lying and deception versus being truthful. In fact, Islam has developed a doctrine of deception called *taqiyya*, which is particularly prevalent among Shi’ah Muslims (see Sookhdeo 2004: 89-92); the Sunni equivalent is called *muda’rat* (“Some Islamic Doctrines” 2018: n.p. [this article discusses this issue in some detail]). The doctrine is based on certain passages from the Qur’an and a number of ahadith. In his commentary on Q. 3:28 (“*Let not the believers take for friends or helpers unbelievers rather than believers: if any do that, in nothing will there be help from Allah: except by way of precaution, that ye may Guard yourselves from them*”), Ibn Kathir considers the case of a Muslim who fears for his safety from a non-Muslim: “In this case, such believers are allowed to show friendship to the disbelievers outwardly, but never inwardly. For instance, Al-Bukhari recorded that Abu Ad-Darda’ said, ‘We smile in the face of some people although our hearts curse them.’” (Ibn Kathir 2003: Q. 3:28, comment) *Sahih al-Bukhari* also reports a close companion of Muhammad saying, “I may say things just to cheat my enemy” (al-Bukhari: 6930). In this regard, the Qur’an defines an “enemy” as follows: “*Unbelievers are unto you open enemies*” (Q. 4:101; Hilali-Khan’s translation of this ayah says, “*disbelievers are ever unto you open enemies*”).

Lying and deceit are allowed to *murder* non-Muslims: “The Prophet said, ‘Who is ready to kill Ka’b bin Ashraf (i.e. a Jew).’ Muhammad bin Maslama replied, ‘Do you like me to kill him?’ The Prophet replied in the affirmative. Muhammad bin Maslama said, ‘Then allow me to say what I like.’ The Prophet replied, ‘I do (i.e. allow you).’” (al-Bukhari: 3032; see also 4037; Muslim: 1801) Lying is even allowed to gain wealth: “After the conquest of the city of Khaybar by the Muslims, the Prophet (S) was approached by Hajaj Ibn ‘Aalat and told: ‘O Prophet of Allah: I have in Mecca some excess wealth and some relatives, and I would like to have them back; am I excused if I bad-mouth you (to escape persecution)?’ The Prophet (S) excused him and said: ‘Say whatever you have to say.’” (Abbas 1995-2014: Al-Taqiyya, Dissimulation Part 1, ref. 8) Abdul-Wahhab reports that Ibn Mas’ud (one of Muhammad’s close companions) said, “To swear by Allah while lying is more loved by me than to swear by other than Him while speaking truth” (Abdul-Wahhab 2002: 142). The sixth Shi’ah imam, Ja’far as-Sadiq (699-765), even said that “He who has no *taqiyyah*, has no religion.” (Enayat 2005: 176) Consequently, Hamid Enayat concludes that “in practice it [*taqiyya*] has become the norm of public behavior whenever there is a conflict between faith and expediency.” (Ibid.: 177)

Islam’s system of “morality” and salvation based on unquestioning obedience to the dictates of the Qur’an and Muhammad also point up a fundamental moral difference between Christianity and Islam: When supposed Christians lie, cheat, and kill the innocent, they are acting *inconsistent* with their faith and are being *disobedient* to Christ; when Muslims lie, cheat, and kill innocent people they are acting *consistent* with their faith and are being *obedient* to Muhammad and the Qur’an.²⁰ This Islamic system of “morality” inherently leads

¹⁹ Muhammad’s own view of jihad is clearly stated in the Hadith: “Allah’s Messenger said, ‘By Him in Whose Hand my life is, I would love to fight in Allah’s Cause and then get martyred and then resurrected (come to life) and then get martyred and then resurrected (come to life) and then get martyred, and then resurrected (come to life) and then get martyred and then resurrected (come to life).’” (al-Bukhari: 7227; see also 36, 2795, 2797, 2972, 7226)

²⁰ Sundiata observes that “the atrocious deeds of Islamic States and the Islamic terrorists can be traced to something Muhammad himself said, did, or sanctioned” (Sundiata 2006: 17). On the other hand, “Those who denounce the oppressive, hypocritical and violent actions done in the name of Jesus of Nazareth will find the same Jesus on their side because He uncompromisingly spoke against these vices and was Himself oppressed and murdered for doing nothing wrong” (Ibid.: 18). Recall Shayesteh’s comment, “We understand that the so-called Christian world has extensively failed to surrender

to fanaticism, deception, and violence, since those things are clearly and repeatedly emphasized throughout the Qur'an and the Hadith. As Muslim journalist Abdel Rahman al-Rashed wrote, "It is a certain fact that not all Muslims are terrorists, but it is equally certain, and exceptionally painful, that almost all terrorists are Muslims" (al-Rashed 2004: n.p.). Almost 75% of the over 12,500 terrorist murders committed in 2011 were by Muslims ("Muslim Statistics (Terrorism)" 2016: Worldwide) Multiple surveys around the world demonstrate that Muslims who advocate violence and terror are *not* a "tiny minority of extremists" ("Muslim Opinion Polls" 2002-2019; Shapiro 2014). For example, in a recent poll taken for the Al Jazeera Arabic television channel, 81% of the respondents support "the organizing victories of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)" (Schachtel 2015: n.p.). This is increasingly significant to the extent that Muslims take their faith seriously, since Muhammad said, "None of you [truly] believes until his desires are subservient to that which I have brought" (al-Nawawi, *40 Hadith*: 41), and that includes violence and deception.

3. There is no assurance of salvation in Islam. Muhammad said, "There is no one among you who does not have two abodes: An abode in Paradise and an abode in Hell. If he dies and enters Hell, the people of Paradise inherit his abode." (Ibn Majah: vol. 5, book 37, no. 4341) He also said, "Jannah [Paradise] is nearer to anyone of you than your shoe-lace, and so is the (Hell) Fire" (al-Nawawi, *Riyad*: book 1, no. 105). With the incredibly comprehensive list of "dos and do nots" that no one can fully keep and the fact that shirk can be as hidden as a black ant on a black rock in a dark night, no Muslim can know if he or she will be admitted to Paradise or to Hell. Indeed, Athari states that even the most devout Muslims "think that one should say *insha' Allah* when describing oneself as a believer, i.e., one should say, 'I am a believer, if Allah wills.' They do not state with certainty that they are believers, because of their intense fear of Allah, their belief in the divine will and decree, and their reluctance to praise themselves." (al-Athari 2005: 135) Further, Islam teaches that "the hearts are between two Fingers of Allah's Fingers [and] He changes them as He wills" (at-Tirmidhi: vol. 4, book 6, no. 2140). Even Abu Bakr, Muhammad's closest companion and the first caliph, "used to place his right hand on his heart and repeat loudly the supplication of The Messenger of Allah . . . : 'O (Allah) the Turner of hearts! Make my heart constantly firm on Your religion (of Islam).' Although he had such a faith, which was too great to suffice all the inhabitants of the earth, he was afraid that his heart might go astray. So, he used to utter, while weeping: 'Would that I have been a bitten tree!' whenever he was reminded of his position in Allah's sight, he would say: 'By Allah! I would not rest assured and feel safe from Allah's punishment, even if one of my feet was in Paradise.'" (Khalid 2005: 98-99)

Additionally, no Muslim can have any assurance of salvation because Islam "rejects the possibility of its followers experiencing God in the life on earth. . . . The Qur'an on the contrary, believes that salvation does not take place during life on earth, but in the life after death although a person's fate after death is uncertain." (Shayesteh 2004: 131, 202) That, of course, is the opposite of Christianity, where salvation "is received on earth and lasts forever" (Ibid.: 202; see, e.g., **John 3:16; 3:36; Acts 16:31; Rom 10:9-10; Eph 1:13-14; 1 John 5:13**). When we couple all that with the fact that Allah's "forgiveness" is not guaranteed and is completely unpredictable, and no one knows his or her pre-decreed fate, even the most devoted Muslims "believe that the ultimate destiny of people is unknown and no one knows what his end will be" (al-Athari 2005: 148).

Muhammad himself had no assurance of salvation. In the Qur'an, after saying that he was bringing no new message, Muhammad said, "*nor do I know what will be done with me or with you*" (**Q. 46:9**). The Hadith also attests to the fact that Muhammad had no assurance of salvation. In one hadith, he had visited a house where a man had died. Muhammad said, "As for him, death has come to him and I wish him all good from Allah. By Allah, though I am Allah's Messenger, I neither know what will happen to me, nor to you." (al-Bukhari: 7018; see also 1243, 3929)

In fact, Muhammad was very fearful of death and of Allah's judgment: "Aisha said that a Jewess came to her and mentioned the punishment in the grave, saying to her, 'May Allah protect you from the punishment of the grave.' Aisha then asked Allah's Messenger about the punishment of the grave. He said, 'Yes, (there is) punishment in the grave.' Aisha added, 'After that I never saw Allah's Messenger but seeking refuge with Allah from the punishment in the grave in every prayer he prayed.'" (al-Bukhari: 1372) Muhammad was so insecure and his fear of Allah's judgment was so great that it caused him to panic whenever a strong wind blew, an eclipse occurred, or even a cloud appeared in the sky—because he thought these natural phenomena signified that the day of judgment was at hand! "Whenever a strong wind blew, anxiety appeared on the face of the Prophet (fearing that wind might be a sign of Allah's wrath)." (al-Bukhari: 1034) "The sun eclipsed and the

itself to Jesus Christ. Therefore, it is the *disbelief* in Jesus Christ that has spread immorality among those who apparently live under the name of Christianity. For the Gospel of Jesus Christ, there is only one type of Christian in the world, only those who are saved from the ruler of immorality. Muslims, therefore, must not take the immorality of so-called Christian societies as a sign of the Christian faith having shortcomings." (Shayesteh 2004: 204, *emph. added*)

Prophet got up, being afraid that it might be the Hour (i.e. Day of Judgment). He went to the Mosque and offered the prayer with the longest Qiyam, bowing and prostration that I had ever seen him doing. Then he said, ‘These signs which Allah sends do not occur because of the life or death of somebody, but Allah makes His worshipers afraid by them. So when you see anything thereof, proceed to remember Allah, invoke Him and ask for His forgiveness.’” (al-Bukhari: 1059) “Aisha said, ‘If the Prophet saw a cloud in the sky, he would walk to and fro in agitation, go out and come in, and the color of his face would change, and if it rained, he would feel relaxed.’ So Aisha knew that state of his. So the Prophet said, ‘I don’t know (am afraid), it may be similar to what happened to some people referred to in the Holy Qur’an in the following Verse: - Then when they saw it as a dense cloud coming towards their valleys, they said, ‘This is a cloud bringing us rain! Nay, but, it is that (torment) which you were asking to be hastened a wind wherein is severe torment. (46:24)’” (al-Bukhari: 3206) At the time of his death, Muhammad had no assurance of salvation and was calling on Allah to forgive him. His wife Aisha reported, “I heard the Messenger of Allah saying at his death: ‘O Allah, forgive me and have mercy on me, and join me with the Highest Company’” (at-Tirmidhi: 3496; see also al-Bukhari: 4440, 5674).

Since even Muhammad had no assurance of salvation, no Muslim can possibly have any assurance of his or her eternal destiny. Recall that according to **Q. 33:56** believers and even angels are to pray for Muhammad. This leaves the question: If Muslims have to pray for Muhammad, who is going to pray for them?

4. Allah is neither holy nor just. As we saw earlier, Christianity has a “high view” of sin (i.e., sin ultimately and primarily is against God) because Christianity has a high view of God’s holiness (i.e., God is perfectly holy and therefore cannot abide the presence of sin) and a high view of humanity (i.e., people have been “created in the image of God” and sin tarnishes that image because it is contrary to Godlikeness); as a result, God’s forgiveness was costly. In contrast, Islam has a “low view” of sin, which necessarily means that Islam has a low view of Allah’s holiness. Thus, the Qur’an indicates that human sin has no effect on Allah at all: “*And if any strive (with might and main), they do so for their own souls: for Allah is free of all needs from all creation*” (**Q. 29:6**; see also **Q. 14:8; 22:64; 35:15; 47:38**). In commenting on this verse, Ali states, “When we speak of serving Allah, it is not that we confer any benefit on Him. For He has no needs, and is independent of all His Creation (Cf. 14:8). In conforming to His Will, we are seeking our own good, as in yielding to evil we are doing harm to ourselves.” (Ali 2006: Q. 29:6n.3428) Allah’s being completely indifferent to and unaffected by human sin (or salvation) is confirmed in the Hadith: “He said to those who were on his right side: Towards Paradise and I don’t care. He said to those who were on his left shoulder: Towards the fire and I don’t care.” (Al-Tabrizi 1939: 3:117-18, no. 454w; see also no. 455w) In other words, our sin is only against our own souls but is not a sin against God (see **Q. 7:23; 39:53; 41:46; 47:38**). These passages and Islam’s views of sin and salvation mean that Allah is unholy and unjust in at least four ways:

- First, since Allah “doesn’t care” about whether people are righteous or sin, and sin has no effect on him in any event, he is unholy because sin essentially means nothing to him and therefore he is unjust to judge people for their actions.
- Second, to the extent that salvation is a weighing of one’s good deeds against one’s bad deeds, it shows that Allah is unholy and unjust because he is accepting *temporal and imperfect* deeds (which by their very nature do not transform a sinful person into a holy person) in satisfaction for sin which has *permanently* corrupted the person’s soul, affected others, and affected the world.
- Third, since by pre-decree and active intervention Allah is the *direct* cause of human sin, he is unholy for directly causing people to sin and is unjust to judge people for the sin he both decreed and caused.
- Fourth, with respect to Allah’s simply choosing to forgive people’s sins without at the same time seeing to it that justice has been done (as, for example, Christ accomplished on the cross), “If God should forgive by the exercise of His mercy alone, he would be evading the demands of His justice and righteousness. Such an evasion would indicate a defect in the being of God. Certainly such an act would be unworthy of the glory of God.” (Khan 1992: 23) In fact, in one hadith Muhammad said, “Seventy thousand people of my Ummah would be admitted into Paradise *without rendering any account*.” (Muslim: 218a, *emph. added*) Consequently, for Allah to “just forgive” amounts to saying that there is no difference between sin and righteousness, good and evil, or justice and injustice. Allah thereby also reveals himself to be unholy because either his law was unholy to begin with or, if it is holy, not requiring that it be fulfilled is unholy. For Allah to “just forgive” also makes him more one dimensional and simplistic than even a human being, since human beings recognize that to forgive presents the dilemma either of turning a blind eye to evil or means that the person doing the forgiving must himself bear the cost of the wrong.

5. Because Islamic salvation does not deal with humanity’s fundamental nature, Islamic Paradise would be as defective as is the earth. Muhammad said, “O people! Allah is Pure and, therefore, accepts only that which is pure” (al-Nawawi, *Riyad*: book 19, no. 44). Although Muslims also recognize that human nature is fatally

flawed, none of the Islamic plans of salvation address that or purport to give people a new heart, mind, spirit, or nature. “Simply enforcing a religious law [*shari’ah*] by political forces cannot guarantee the moral purity of a person or a society” (Shayesteh 2004: 202; see also Ghabril 2003: 24 [“neither punishing the thief by imprisonment nor cutting his hand nor flogging the adulterer changes the inclination of the first to theft or the second to adultery”]). Nehls and Eric point out, “Muslims go to great pains to observe the extremely multifaceted law of Islam (Shariah, Fiqh) in the hope that this will lead to justification on Judgement Day. But no law in the world makes a man righteous. A law determines what is right and wrong, but cannot make a person right. It is simply the standard by which judgement shall be passed.” (Nehls and Eric 2010: 112)

The result is that *regardless of which Islamic theory of salvation one uses*, people’s characters are not being changed and there is no claim that they are. Thus, they are unfit for heaven, and heaven is unfit for them. This is not simply a theoretical problem. Daniel Shayesteh points out that in Islam, “We know from the Qur’an that Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden by Allah after they first sinned. Allah could no longer bear their dualistic and sinful nature in the Garden of Eden and drove them out of his presence. However, the situation has changed now; people can enter paradise despite the impurity of their souls.” (Shayesteh 2003: 72) Muhammad admitted this when he discussed his intercession: “I was given the choice between being admitted to Paradise, and I chose intercession, because it is more general and more sufficient. Do you think it is for the pious? No, it is for the impure sinners.” (Ibn Majah: vol 5, book 37, no. 4311) The situation is worse even than that: *Satan has access to Islamic Paradise!* In his commentary on the Qur’an, Ibn Kathir states, “The majority of scholars said that Shaytan was originally prohibited from entering Paradise, but there were times when he sneaked into it in secret. For instance, the Tawrah stated that Iblis hid inside the snake’s mouth and entered Paradise. Some scholars said that it is possible that Shaytan led Adam and Hawwa’ [Eve] astray on his way out of Paradise. Some scholars said that he led Adam and Hawwa’ astray when he was on earth, while they were still in heaven, as stated by Az-Zamakhshari.” (Ibn Kathir 2003: Q. 2:36, comment)

Additionally, the inhabitants of Islamic Paradise are free to indulge in activities that are specifically forbidden and considered vices on earth. Yahiya Emerick admits that “nearly all of the pleasures of Earth are regulated or even forbidden for a Muslim, so their reward for obeying God in this life is guilt-free indulgence in the next” (Emerick 2004: 38). For example, the Qur’an limits Muslim men to marrying up to four wives (Q. 4:3). However, in Paradise Muhammad said, “There is no one whom Allah will admit to Paradise but Allah will marry him to seventy-two wives, two from houris [beautiful companions; see Q. 44:54; 52:20; 55:72] and seventy from his inheritance from the people of Hell, all of whom will have desirable front passages and he will have a male member that never becomes flaccid (i.e., soft and limp)” (Ibn Majah: vol. 5, book 37, no. 4337).²¹ The incoherence of Islamic law is seen in the fact that the very things that send someone to Hell nevertheless will be rewards in Paradise! Q. 5:90 (Hilali-Khan) says, “*O you who believe! Intoxicants (all kinds of alcoholic drinks), gambling, AlAnsab, and AlAzlam (arrows for seeking luck or decision) are an abomination of Shaitan’s (Satan) handiwork. So avoid (strictly all) that (abomination) in order that you may be successful.*” In the Hadith, Muhammad said, “Allah has forbidden Khamr [intoxicants], and every intoxicant is unlawful” (an-Nasa’i: 5700; see also al-Bukhari: 5579; Muslim: 2003b; Abi Dawud: 3685; Ibn Majah: vol. 4, book 30, no. 3390). However, in Paradise there will be “*rivers of wine, a joy to those who drink*” (Q. 47:15). Thus, the Qur’an and the Hadith do not set forth a moral code at all; they are simply arbitrary rules that can be changed at Allah’s (or Muhammad’s) whim.²² The inescapable conclusion is that the Islamic “Paradise” will be even worse than life on earth because it will be full of inhabitants who will have natures just as sinful as they had on earth but will be able to indulge in their wildest fantasies and freely engage in activities now viewed as abominations from Satan.

²¹ Not surprisingly, there is no corresponding promise made to the women who may make it to Paradise.

²² In addition to forbidding alcohol, Muhammad commanded, “Do not wear silk or brocade and do not drink [from] vessels of gold and silver, and do not eat in the dishes made of them (i.e., gold and silver), for these are for them (the non-believers) in this world” (Muslim: 2067g; see also 2065b, c, 2067a; al-Bukhari: 5832, 5833, 5837; an-Nasa’i: 5136, 5301; Abi Dawud 3723; Ibn Majah: vol. 4, book 30, no. 3414); however, in Islamic Paradise, the inhabitants will be “*dressed in fine silk and in rich brocade*” (Q. 35:33; see also Q. 18:31; 22:23; 76:12, 21); and “*To them will be passed round, dishes and goblets of gold*” (Q. 43:71; see also Q. 76:15 [“*And amongst them will be passed round vessels of silver*”])). Another hadith says, “I was sitting with the Prophet [SAW] when a woman came to him and said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, two bracelets of gold.’ He said: ‘Two bracelets of fire.’” (an-Nasa’i: 5142; see also Abi Dawud: 4236; at-Tirmidhi: 637); however, in Islamic Paradise the inhabitants “*shall be adorned therein with bracelets of gold and pearls*” (Q. 22:23; see also Q. 35:33). Muhammad also said, “Any woman who puts on a necklace of gold, Allah will put something similar of fire around her neck” (an-Nasa’i: 5139; see also Abi Dawud: 4238); however, Allah will emancipate some people from Hell “and they will have (golden) necklaces, and then they will enter Paradise” (al-Bukhari: 7439).

IV. Sin and Salvation: Conclusion

Sultan Muhammad Khan raised the issues that go to the heart of every religion: the issues of sin and salvation. Christianity and Islam present two diametrically opposed views on these issues. The Christian position is internally coherent. It recognizes that sin fundamentally is rebellion against God and the breaking of relationship with God which affects everything else. Christianity offers a realistic assessment of the nature of mankind and provides a plausible explanation for why humanity has an inherently sinful disposition. It accurately acknowledges that human beings are not able to rid themselves of their sinful nature no matter how much they try. It therefore admits that if people are going to be saved and their natures are to be transformed, then only God can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Christianity recognizes that forgiveness is costly: it is the wronged party bearing the cost and paying the price of the wrongdoer's sin. In God's becoming a man in the person of Jesus Christ and taking humanity's sins upon himself as our representative on the cross, the Christian view alone is able to harmoniously resolve all of the above matters. As Sultan Khan said, "If Christ had promised salvation without giving His life, the demands of mercy would certainly have been fulfilled. In order to satisfy the demands of justice also, Christ paid the ransom, which was His precious blood. In this way God has manifested His love for us." (Khan 1992: 26)

Finally, Christianity enables people to appropriate salvation and a new life here on earth where it is most needed. This gives Christians the peace that comes from the assurance of their salvation. It also gives Christians a unique motivation to live righteous lives. As Timothy Keller said, "Religion operates on the principle 'I obey—therefore I am accepted by God.' But the operating principle of the gospel is 'I am accepted by God through what Christ has done—therefore I obey.'" (Keller 2008: 179-80) The God of the Bible does not merely "forgive" the Christian, he actively equips the Christian to live as they should by giving the Christian a new heart, the mind of Christ, and the indwelling Holy Spirit. Christians are thereby changed from the inside-out, and God progressively works in them so that the "fruit of the Spirit" (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control) become more and more manifest (see **Gal 5:22-23**) as they become "*conformed to the image of His Son*" (**Rom 8:29**).

Islam, on the other hand, is inconsistent on essentially all matters relating to sin and salvation. Its official position that people are born pure and naturally are predisposed to good is not a realistic assessment of human nature. Islam cannot account for the universality of human sin. Consequently, much Islamic authority contradicts its official doctrine and admits that all human beings are fundamentally flawed and predisposed to sin. Both in the Hadith and otherwise, Islam admits the Christian doctrines of the "fall" of mankind and the inheritance of our sinful natures from Adam and Eve (i.e., "original sin").

While Allah, like the God of the Bible, is called "holy," "merciful," and "just," a large body of Islamic authority attributes human sin directly to Allah's pre-decree and to his active intervention in people's lives thereby causing them to sin. Further, the Hadith reveals that Allah "doesn't care" whether people go to Paradise or Hell. All of this leads to incoherent views of how people are saved. Some Islamic lines of authority talk about weighing one's good and bad deeds, while others speak of Allah's forgiving or not forgiving people for reasons of his own, unrelated to people's deeds, or simply basing people's eternal destinies on Allah's pre-decree.

In Islam the issue of one's salvation is not determined until after death. Therefore, no Muslim—including Muhammad himself—can have any assurance that his or her sins will be forgiven and that he or she will go to Paradise instead of Hell. A corollary is that Allah does not change Muslims from the "inside-out" like the biblical God who works in Christians by his Spirit. Further, despite the promises of bliss in Paradise, the Islamic Paradise would contain all the flaws and evil of this world because the people inhabiting Paradise will be no different than their "fallen" or sinful natures are now.

Ultimately, Islam's incoherence and inadequate, non-transforming views of salvation stem from the fact that Islam has inadequate doctrines of both God and mankind. As John Stott puts it, "If we bring God down to our level and raise ourselves to his, then of course we see no need for a radical salvation, let alone for a radical atonement to secure it. When, on the other hand, we have glimpsed the blinding glory of the holiness of God, and have been so convicted of our sin by the Holy Spirit that we tremble before God and acknowledge what we are, namely 'hell-deserving sinners', then and only then does the necessity of the cross appear so obvious that we are astonished we never saw it before." (Stott 1986: 109) Theology thus has important implications not only for one's destiny after this life is over but also for one's life and for the state of society now. In all of these regards, the differences between Christianity and Islam are profound and fundamental.

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THE AUTHOR



Jonathan Menn lives in Appleton, WI, USA. He received a B.A. in political science from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, with honors, in 1974, and was inducted into the Phi Beta Kappa honor society. He then earned a J.D. from Cornell Law School, magna cum laude, in 1977, and was inducted into the Order of the Coif legal honor society. He spent the next 28 years practicing law, as a civil trial attorney, in Chicago and then as a partner at the Menn Law Firm in Appleton, WI. He became a believer and follower of Jesus Christ in 1982. An increasing love for theology and ministry led to his pursuing a Master of Divinity at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, IL. He received his M.Div. from TEDS, summa cum laude, in May 2007. Between 2007-2013 he was the East Africa Director of Equipping Pastors International. Now Jonathan is the Director of Equipping Church Leaders-East Africa (www.eclea.net). His extensive written teaching materials on biblical subjects are available at www.eclea.net. Jonathan may be contacted at: jonathanmenn@yahoo.com.