

Bible Studies based on the book "Facing the Muslim Challenge" by John Gilchrist. Compiled/Edited by N.T. Jabbour D Th.

THE CRUCIFIXION AND ATONEMENT

The Muslims' Perspective.

When it comes to sin and human nature, there is a big difference between what the Bible teaches and what Islam teaches.

1. According to the Qur'an **humans are neutral beings capable of doing good or evil as they choose**. Although the Qur'an points out to the instinctive tendency of man to turn away from God and to be ungrateful to him preferring rather to follow indulgent passions (Surah 100:6-8), yet according to the Qur'an **humans are not in a state of depravity**. There is no original sin at birth and the child is born like a **clean slate**.
2. When a baby is born, **by nature and constitution**, it is created to realize that God exists and that He is one. (Surah 30:30). The legend about Hai Ibn Yakzan is used to illustrate this doctrine. Hai was born in a forest and for some reason he was abandoned by his parents. Animals cared for the little boy and through the years he did not meet another human. As a teenager he saw a lion one time who attacking a deer and after taking a chunk of its chest left it to die. After the departure of the lion, Hai approached the dying deer with the open chest and noticed that the heart was still beating. Hai's conclusion from that experience that there is one God and it is right to trust Him.
3. Muslims believe that God did not abandon His beloved "prophet" to be defeated by his enemies on the cross. God took Jesus up to heaven and someone else was crucified in his place. Some Muslims think it was one of those that came to watch the crucifixion; others think it was Judas, where the physical appearance changed to the degree that people thought it was Jesus. "They said: 'We killed the Messiah Jesus, son of Mary, messenger of God, but they did not kill him, nor crucified him but so it **was made to appear to them**. Those who dispute about this are full of doubts, they have no certain knowledge but follow only conjecture. Assuredly they killed him not, but God raised him to himself. And God is the Mighty and Wise". Surah 4:157.

1. According to the Bible the sin of Adam was not just an offense against God's laws but an **act of defiance** which set the whole human history in opposition to God. How do you see this in Rom 3:9-18?

2. What is man like in his sinfulness and **depravity** according to the following passages? Rom 1:18-25, Eph 2:1-2, Jer 17:9.

3. The ultimate question is not whether man is by nature as bad as the Bible makes him out to be, but whether God is as good as the Bible declares Him to be. According to the Bible, God intrinsically or within Himself is holy righteous and good. Man, in breaking God's laws, falls short of God's holy character and His absolute standards (Rom 3:23). How can you communicate this truth to a Muslim who argues that Christianity has a very pessimistic view of the nature of man?

4. Compare these two men **Adam and Jesus**. "For as by a man came death, by a man also has come the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so on Christ shall all be made alive" 1st Cor 15:21-22. Muslims believe that the Garden of Eden was in heaven, and they also believe that after Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden neither they nor any of their descendents were allowed to go back into the Garden. Furthermore most Muslims believe that had Adam and Eve stayed in the Garden they would have never died. What similarities do you see between Muslim beliefs to 1 Cor 15:21-22?

5. According to Islam Adam and Eve's sin resulted in tragic consequences. They and their descendents were not allowed back into the Garden even though Muslims assume that God forgave them. According to Islam why were Adam and Eve and all their offspring **not allowed back into the Garden**?

6. In coming back to the similarities and contrasts between Adam and Jesus. Muslims believe that **Jesus was taken up to heaven** and He is the only man alive in heaven who has never died. How did Jesus get there when neither Adam nor any of

his descendents, including Muhammad, were accepted back into heaven? How would a Muslim respond to this question?

7. Jesus said in Jn 3:13 "No one has ascended into heaven but He who descended from heaven, the Son of man". Also in Jn 16:28 He said. " I came from the Father and have come into the world, again I am leaving the world and going to the Father". It is good to point out to the Muslim that Jesus came down from heaven the first time to become like us ordinary human beings "in the likeness of sinful flesh" Rom 8:3, and He will come a second time to take His followers back to the "Garden" where they will become like Him. Do you think that Christianity has a pessimistic view of human nature?

8. Muslims tend to think of **sin as a mistake and forgetfulness of God's commands**. Yet according to the Qur'an the devil whispered to Adam and Eve: " Your Lord has only forbidden you this tree lest you become like the angels or those who live forever". How could Adam and Eve forget the one command that God gave them even when the devil have just reminded them of the command?

9. According to Surah 2:36 Adam and Eve **were expelled** by God from the Garden and **fell down from the "high"** Garden down to earth. "But the devil made them slip from it and caused them to depart from the state in which they were. "And We said: Fall down from here, some enemies to the others. And on the earth there will be a dwelling and provision for a time". The Arabic word for "descend" or "fall down" in this verse is a command that God gave to Adam and Eve "Ihbitu" and the root of it "habata" which means fell down from a higher to a lower sphere. Adam and Eve were not merely expelled out of the Garden but also fell down and descend to earth. No wonder death (provision for a time Surah 2:36) was the ultimate consequence of their sin. Was Adam's sin mere forgetfulness or was it a conscious decision to follow the advice of the devil rather than following the one and only command of God? Is there a need for a Savior in Islam?

10. In contrast to Muhammad who is dead and buried in Medina, Jesus is alive in heaven. He was alive in heaven before He came to earth. He returned to heaven and He has been alive in heaven since then. Before Muhammad was born and during his life time and throughout Muslim history the past fourteen centuries, **Christ has been alive in His heavenly glory**. How else can you point out to the uniqueness of Christ?

11. Another issue that Muslims have a problem with in **Christianity** is that it is **too easy**. Christians sin and God keeps forgiving them. That does not sound right because Muslims believe that the favor of God needs to be earned through a succession of good works and religious devotion. Actually Paul asked the same question "Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace"? (Rom 6:15). Paul's response to his question: "How can we who died to sin still live in it"? (Rom 6:2). What do you think of Paul's answer?

12. How can you explain what really happens to the person who repents of his sins, forsakes them and determines to live for God? Rom 6:1-14. Is the **Gospel** a Gospel of "**cheap grace**"?

13. Jesus Christ died not only to free us from the **guilt of sin** but also from its **power**. Jesus once said that whoever commits sin becomes a slave to sin (Jn 8:34). If Muslims think that sin has no power over us because it is merely a choice, then why wouldn't Muslims **decide** that they **will** never sin in the future? Do you think that Muslims would admit that the tendency to sin is a compelling force and that it is the reality of the human nature?

14. "But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of reaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness" Rom 6:17-18. Jesus came not only to "redeem us from all iniquity" but also to "purify for Himself a people who are zealous for good deeds" (Titus 2:14). In contrast to Muslim theology, what **hope** do we have regarding **overcoming sin**? Do you think that this is attractive to Muslims?

15. **Blood** in the Bible is symbolic of forgiveness of sins. Just as the shedding of blood of bulls, lambs and goats in times past in the Temple had been the means by which God has "passed over" or overlooked the sins of His people. **Water**, however, symbolized the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the rivers of new life which believers also receive. Why was John in his Gospel so specific about the blood and water in Jn 19:33-34? "When they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water". What is the significance of the fact that when a person believes in Christ, he is not only redeemed but also receives the Holy Spirit?

16. Some Muslims are familiar with the story of the **rich young ruler** who came to Jesus and asked Him what he should do to inherit eternal life. Jesus replied "If you would enter life, keep the commandments". Muslim think that Jesus taught that if a person wants to receive eternal life he must keep God's commandments and they think that Jesus taught that. By looking at the story of the rich young ruler in Mt 19 and Mk 10 what do you think was Jesus explanation of the **purpose of the commandments** and how to receive eternal life?

17. In the Sermon on the Mount in **Mt 5-7** Jesus taught about the absolute demands of our Holy God. Then He went on to say in Mt 5:48 that the absolute standard of God or the **"passing grade"** for us for being accepted by God is nothing less than 100%. "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect". James said in James 2:10 "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it". Muslims think that the **law is a ladder to be climbed**. Do you think that deep within their hearts Muslims believe that the law is doable and that they can climb that ladder? What is the **purpose of the law** according to the following verses?

Rom 3:20 "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in His sight by observing the law, rather through the law we become conscious of sin".

Rom 5:20 "The law was added so that the trespass might increase."

Rom 7:7 ".. I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said do not covet".

Rom 10:4 "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes".

Gal 3:10,24 "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written 'cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law'. "So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith".

18. Leo **Tolstoy** drew a contrast between Jesus teachings and all other religions. According to Tolstoy, all religious systems tend to promote external rules. In contrast Jesus refused to define a set of rules that His followers could fulfill with

a sense satisfaction. One can never measure up to commands such as "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.... Be perfect therefore as your heavenly Father is perfect". Jesus did not present a **ladder** to climb, but a **mirror** that helps us to see our depravity.

Tolstoy wrote, " The test of observance of external religious teachings is whether or not conduct conforms with their decrees (observe the Sabbath, get circumcised, pay your tithe, pray the five daily prayers, fast the month of Ramadan etc..) such conformity is indeed possible. The test of observance of Christ's teaching is our consciousness of our failure to attain an ideal perfection. The degree to which we draw near this perfection cannot be seen, all we see is the extent of our deviation". (In Yancey P 198). In other words, **the proof of our spiritual maturity is not how "pure" we are, but how much we are aware of our impurity. The very awareness opens the door to grace.** Our focus should not be on how well we are doing, but rather how inadequate we are.

Paul's maturity is seen in 1Tim 1. " I am so grateful to Christ Jesus for making me adequate to do this work. He went out on a limb, you know, in trusting me with this ministry. The only credentials I brought to it were invective and witch hunts and arrogance. But I was treated mercifully because I didn't know what I was doing - did know Who I was doing it against! Grace mixed with faith and love poured over me and into me. And all because of Jesus. Here is a word you can take to heart and depend on: Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. I'm proof - Public Sinner Number One - of someone who could never have made it apart from his sheer mercy. And now he shows me off - to those who are right on the edge of trusting him forever". The Message paraphrase.

What do you think of this theology? What does it take for a Muslim to have the paradigm shift needed for him to give up on the ladder mentality and to begin to understand grace?

19. There is common ground between what the Qur'an teaches about the crucifixion (Surah 4:157) and what the Bible teaches. The common ground includes the following:

1. The Jews came to arrest Jesus.
2. They intended to crucify Him.
3. Someone was indeed crucified.

4. All those who stood at the foot of the cross were convinced that it was Jesus who was on the cross.

The only point in dispute is this - **was it actually Jesus who was crucified** (as the Bible teaches) or was it someone else (as the Qur'an teaches)? "The someone else" could have been one of those that came to watch the crucifixion, or it could have been Judas. Which of the following objections are the strongest ones against the Qur'an's substitution theory?

A) It can't be Judas because his death by suicide was a known fact to the Christians in Jerusalem and to the leadership of the Jews in the city. If it was Judas that was crucified in the place of Jesus, then who committed suicide in the place of Judas?

B) Why would God have an innocent man to get crucified in the place of Jesus? Crucifixion was the most severe punishment of that day.

C) If God did not want Jesus to be crucified and not to be defeated by His enemies, wouldn't it have been more glorious to God and to Jesus if Jesus rose to heaven and everybody saw it?

D) Mary is the only woman mentioned in the Qur'an and she is highly esteemed. Why would God allow those that are closest to Jesus, including Mary, to suffer and think that Jesus was crucified when He was not crucified according to the Qur'an?

E) Jesus spoke from the cross to His mother and to His disciple John. If it was another person who was hanging on the cross, wouldn't Mary, John and others have noticed that there is a difference in the voice? If the one on the cross was not Jesus, why would this person play the role of Jesus and accept this severe punishment rather than shout out loud that he is innocent and he is not Jesus?

F) The disciples believed without a shadow of doubt that Jesus was crucified on Friday at 9 AM and He died at 3 PM and rose from the dead early Sunday morning. They saw Him several times during a period of 40 days. They saw the marks of the nails on His hands. Some of them ate with Him. Forty days after His resurrection from the dead they saw Him rise to

heaven after He gave them the Great Commission. These disciples were willing to risk their lives for the truth they believed.

"I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here for He has risen, as He said. Come and see the place where He lay. Then go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead". Mt 28:5-7

"This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by hands of lawless men. But God raised Him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it". Acts 2:23-24.

If the events of the cross and the resurrection were a hoax and not really true, then doesn't this make out of God to be the source of the greatest deception in religious history?

20. Some Muslim authors that were influenced by the **Ahmadiyya** sect claim that Jesus did not really die at the cross. He just **fainted** and the Roman soldiers thought that He died. So He was lowered from the cross and was allowed to be taken to the tomb. According to this theory rather than Jesus being raised from the dead He later **recovered from His swoon** and appeared to His disciples.

The Ahmadiyya sect was founded by their prophet Mirza Ghulam who lived in India in the 19th century. In 1974 the followers of the Ahmadiyya movement were declared as non-Muslims in Pakistan.

The evidences that are usually cited for this "swooning theory" are the following:

- A) Jesus prayed that God would save Him from death. Jesus prayed "My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless not as I will, but as You will" (Mt 28: 39). It is argued that Jesus was reluctant to die and that the angel was sent to Him to comfort Him and to assure Him that He would be saved from death.

Why would Jesus endure the pains of the Crucifixion for six hours and His deliverance comes only after He faints and does not feel pain anymore? Furthermore why didn't Jesus flee the previous night from Jerusalem since He knew what was going to happen? (Jn 18:4)

- B) The centurion did not make sure that Jesus was dead. The soldiers came to break the legs of the three that were crucified. They broke the legs of the two criminals but when they came to Jesus, they thought that He was already dead. It is argued that the soldiers purely relied on a perception and made no attempt to ensure that Jesus had already died.

Do you think that the Centurion would have risked his life by taking the responsibility for Jesus death if he was not 100% sure that Jesus really died? "Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph." Mk 15:44-45.

- C) Some Muslims argue that the Jewish leaders were concerned that Jesus was still alive after He was brought down from the cross. They went to Pilate to have His tomb properly sealed to ensure that He could not escape.

What we see in the Bible is that the concern of the Jews was not fear that Jesus did not really die, but their fear was that His disciples will steal His body and claim that He rose from the dead as He prophesied (Lk 9:22).

- D) Muslims argue that Jesus referred to His approaching crucifixion by identifying with Jonah. Jonah did not die in the belly of the fish and therefore Jesus did not die but was alive in the tomb and walked out when the angel came and rolled away the stone.

When Jesus gave the sign of Jonah (Mt 12:40), the similarity was confined to the time factor. Jonah was hidden in the belly of a fish and Jesus was hidden in the tomb for three days and three nights. Can this be stretched to include the state in which Jonah and Jesus were in?

In a similar statement that Jesus made: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life" (Jn 3:14). Here the likeness is clearly confined to the state of being lifted up and impaled, the serpent on a pole and Jesus

on the cross. The serpent had been lifted for the healing of the Jews bitten by serpents. Jesus was lifted up for the healing of the nations bound in sin. What do you think of the Muslim argument? Is it too hard to refute?

21. Muslims argue that Jesus was not in the tomb for **three days and three nights** as He said will happen. They argue that three days and three nights make **72 hours not about 33 hours**.

Muslims fail to perceive that there is a major difference between Hebrew speech in the first century and English speech today. In those days Jews counted any part of a day as a whole day when calculating consecutive periods of time.

In Esther 4:16 - 5:1 we see the following "Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 'Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as we do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish I perish,' so Mordecai went away and carried out all Esther's instructions. On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance".

Did Esther risk her neck and went to see the king before 72 hours of fasting were completed? What did three days and three nights mean?

The challenge we face with Muslims is how to become skillful in "turning the tables" and using their questions as an opportunity to get into a greater depth into the Scriptures with them.

