

## QUESTIONS MUSLIMS ASK

### ABOUT WORSHIP

**QUESTION 1: It seems that you Christians have no “Religion”. You do just as you like, when you go to pray, some of you beat drums, some clap, some dance, some sit, some stand. Have you forgotten the way of worship which God laid down for you through the teaching of Moses and Jesus?**

**ANSWER:** The “Religion” which Jesus Christ ordained for us is that we should worship God “in spirit and in truth”. Jesus emphasized that it is the pure in heart who will see God (John 4:24; Matthew 5:8).

Certainly every Christian must worship God; such worship helps us to cleanse our hearts and our lives. The essential part of Christian worship is the same in all Churches. In all services of worship we read the Bible, praise God, give thanks to Him, confess our sins and pray for others as well as for ourselves. But Jesus did not give us detailed rules about the form of our worship. He didn’t prescribe one form of service which every Christian must follow. So we are free to use our own language, and to worship in accordance with our own customs, so far as these do not conflict with our faith in Christ.

Of course Muslims as well have some small differences among themselves in the way that they perform their Ritual Prayer. At a certain point in the prayer there are some who put their hands to the sides, while others fold their arms across the breast.

**QUESTION 2: Why do you Christians wear shoes into the Church? For God said to Moses “take off the shoes from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground” (Acts 7: 33; Exodus 3:5)**

**ANSWER:** It was the custom of the children of Israel (Jews) to take off their shoes in order to show reverence and humility towards God. So this command of God to Moses to take off his shoes means that Moses should show reverence towards God according to the custom of his people. But there is nothing in the Bible to make it compulsory for all men to take off their shoes. Certainly there is no record that Jesus gave any such command to His disciples.

Christians fully believe that they should serve God with reverence. In some lands up till today taking off the shoes is a customary sign of reverence and humility, and Christians who live in such lands may take off their shoes before entering the House of God. But other Christians are free to show their reverence in other ways. We believe that “the Lord does not see as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks upon the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7).

**QUESTION 3: Why do Christians not perform ablutions before they pray? There is ablution in the Bible, see Exodus 30: 17-20 and Exodus 40: 30-32.**

**ANSWER:** These verses in Exodus are a command given to Aaron and his sons (that is, the priest of the ancient Children of Israel). It was commanded that those priests should wash their hands and their feet whenever they went up to the altar in the House of God to offer and animal as burnt sacrifice (especially Exodus 30:20). This is quite different from the ablution which Muslims perform. In this case only the priests were to perform it, not all the

worshippers. They were to wash only the hands and feet, not head, face, nose, etc. They were to wash before offering the burnt sacrifice, which happened twice a day. Ex. 29: 38-41); it was not a question of washing before every prayer, 5 times a day.

But the more important thing is that the disciples of Jesus Christ do not follow the way of worship of the Jews as laid down in the Old Testament. There is no more need for us to offer burnt sacrifice, for Jesus Christ has given himself as the perfect sacrifice once and for all. So even the kind of ablution which Exodus prescribed for the Jewish priests, does not concern Christians.

Some Muslims also point to John 13:3-11, where Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. But this is not the same as Muslim ablutions! Jesus washed only their feet (verses 9-10), and he did this as an example that His disciples should humble themselves to serve others. He was not making this a form of worship which people must perform daily or 5 times a day (See also 1 Peter 3:21; John 15:3; 1 John 1:7).

**QUESTION 4: Why do Christians not perform the Muslim Ritual Prayer (Salaat)? See Nehemiah 8:5-6 and Matthew 4:10.**

**ANSWER:** The Bible nowhere gives instruction that every worshipper must take up some particular position of the body for prayer; rather the Bible gives examples of many different bodily positions in prayer. Some of these postures may be similar to those of Muslims in the Salaat, for example standing (Mark 11:25) or prostrating (Ps. 99:5). Other postures are quite different from the Salaat; for example, kneeling (Ps. 95:6; Acts 20:36), spreading forth the hands (Isaiah 1:15), spreading out the hands towards the House of God in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8: 38).

The special prayer which Jews performed in Nehemiah 8 is quite different from Salaat. For example they were praying in Hebrew, not in Arabic; they performed this worship continuously from the morning up till mid-day; men and women were present together. When it is said that they lifted up their hands, this may be like Salaat, but there are many ways in which it is possible to raise the hands. The Bible does not say that they raised them to the ears as Muslims do. Likewise when it says that they worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground, it is probable that they simply prostrated *flat* on the ground. No details are given.

But even if the book of Nehemiah were making the Muslim Prayer compulsory for Jews, this would not make it a law for Christians. Christians do not perform the same ritual worship as the Jews did. Jesus did not give any instruction about the position of our bodies in prayer, whether kneeling, standing, etc. Jesus's instructions about prayer were that we should purify the heart, that we should have a true faith that we should forgive our enemies and quickly be reconciled to them. (Matthew 5:23-24; Matthew 6: 5-6 and 15; John 15:7).

**QUESTION 5: Why do Christians not sound the “Call to Prayer” (Azan) in a loud voice as Muslims do? The Bible does not say that you should ring bells, rather there is an example of the Call to Prayer in Nehemiah 9:4.**

**ANSWER:** If you read Nehemiah 9 carefully from the first verse you will see that this is not a “Call to Prayer”. The people have already assembled (verse 1), they have been performing their worship already for about six hours (verse 3), then certain people are recorded to have

cried out in a loud voice (verse 4). Again this was not a Call to Prayer sounded by one Muezzin, as in Islam, but 8 people together cried out at the same time.

As to whether we should ring a bell or not ring a bell, this is only a matter of custom in the sight of Christians. It is not a law that we should do so, nor is it forbidden to do so, but we find the bell to be an easy and convenient way to call our people to prayer. I know that you Muslims regard prayer as a most important activity for men and an activity pleasing to God. So I should hope that when you hear the bell calling Christians to prayer you would feel pleased, not annoyed.

**QUESTION 6: Why do Christians not fast for 40 days, as Jesus Christ did? (Matthew 4:2)**

**ANSWER:** Multitudes of Christians do fast every year for 40 days, in order to commemorate how Jesus overcame temptation in the wilderness and to prepare ourselves for the celebration of the suffering and resurrection of Jesus (Holy Week and Easter). This fast is known as “Lent”.

But the Lenten fast is a custom which certain churches (as the Catholics and C.M.S) prescribe for their members; it is not a law given by God for all Christians to observe. For there is no record in the Bible that Jesus himself fasted 40 days every year, only that he did so once; and there is no record that Jesus prescribed such a fast to his followers. So every church is free to establish its own customs of fasting; some observe Lent, others may fast in other ways and at other times.

What Jesus did enjoin upon all Christians without exception is that we should not fast with the desire to be seen and honoured by men, but that we should fast for the sake of God alone.<sup>1</sup> The Bible provides many examples of fasting in order to give all our attention to prayer, through which to overcome temptations,<sup>2</sup> turn away from wickedness and injustice,<sup>3</sup> intercede for others<sup>4</sup> and so on.

**QUESTION 7: Why do Christians not go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem?**

**ANSWER:** In Islam it is compulsory for everyone who is qualified and able, to go on pilgrimage; but there is no such law in Christianity. Many Muslims feel that it is in Mecca that they can meet with God, some Muslims believe that anyone who drinks the water of Zamzam before he dies will obtain the forgiveness of his sins, or than anyone who climbs Mount Arafat will automatically enter Paradise.

But as for Christians, we do not have such ideas in our religion. We believe that God is everywhere, and that man may know Him anywhere. We believe that it is faith in Christ which leads us into the way of salvation, not that we should climb one hill or another, or that we should drink some kind of water or another.

But a Christian will certainly be pleased to go and see the place where Jesus Christ lived on earth, to know what the countryside looks like, so that we can better imagine his deeds, and

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 6:16-18

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 4: 1-11

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 58: 6-7

<sup>4</sup> Deut. 9: 18-20

better understand his Gospel. But this is just for our spiritual encouragement, it is not compulsory.

**QUESTION 8: Why is the Christian religion divided into many different Churches, each worshipping God according to its own inventions?**

**ANSWER:** As we explained above, there is no single form of worship (e.g. how to stand or kneel, what language to speak, etc.) which is compulsory for all Christians all over the world. Jesus Christ did not give us any such instructions. Certainly Jesus taught that there is only one way leading to the Kingdom of God, but this “way” does not refer to an order of worship. It refers to a way of true faith and righteous living.

As regards our faith, the Christian Churches are united on many points. All of us believe the same Bible (see Q. 12), all of us repeat the same Lord’s prayer, and you can hardly find any Christian who does not assent to the same ‘Apostles’ Creed’.

After that, it is not at all surprising that there are some differences of interpretation and emphasis. Anyone who has a sincere religious conviction, cannot be expected to compromise on it; such convictions have sometimes given rise to different “denominations” in the Church.

There is nothing wrong in this, provided that all who trust in the same Jesus as Lord and Saviour will seek increasingly to understand one another and to work together for His glory.

There is no good reason for Muslims to criticize us on this point. They have their own divisions, such as Ahmadiyya movement (Rabwah), which believes in its founder as another prophet after Muhammad; “People of the Qur’an”, who reject the authority of Hadith (Tradition); Shi’ites and Sunnites, etc. In the present time both Muslims and Christians are struggling to resolve such differences.

**QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BIBLE**

**QUESTION 9: Why is it that Christians believe only one part of the Bible and reject the Old Testament? Didn’t Jesus say, “think not that I have come to abolish the Law (i.e. the Tawrat of Moses) and the Prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them.” – (Matthew 5:17)**

**ANSWER:** Christians believe the whole of the Bible from start to finish, but we do look upon the Old Testament differently from the way we look upon the New Testament. The first part of the Bible, called Old Testament, is God’s Word of prophecy and promises. Through the lessons which God gave to the Children of Israel, through the mighty works which He did to save them, we see that God was giving them a revelation little by little, progressively, about the Saviour who was to come. When that Saviour came, he “fulfilled” the prophecy and promise of the Old Testament, he brought in a “new relationship” between God and man, and it is this new relationship which is written about in the second part of the Bible which we call New Testament.

So Christians certainly do not regard the Old Testament as “abolished” or “rejected”. We regard it as part of the Word of God, teaching us that we should worship Him alone, that we should do good, not tell lies, not steal, not commit adultery, and so on.

The New Testament cannot be fully understood without knowledge of what went before, in the Old Testament. But however useful its teaching is, still it is not perfect as the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus said that he came to “fulfill” the Law of Moses, this fulfillment does not mean following every detailed law of the Jewish religion, such as offering burnt sacrifices, etc. The “fulfillment means that Jesus brought out the deep inner meaning of the Law, and developed it to its perfection. For example, Moses had commanded that we should not take excessive revenge, only the moderate revenge of “one eye for one eye”. But Jesus developed this teaching to its perfect conclusion, He “fulfilled” it, saying it is best not to take any revenge at all upon our fellow men – Matthew 5: 38-41; cf. Romans 12: 19-21).

**QUESTION 10: Why do Christians eat the flesh of the pig, when this is forbidden in the Bible – see Lev. 11:7; Deut. 14: 8; Is. 16:17.**

**ANSWER:** The Qur’an itself helps us to answer this question, for according to the Qur’an Jesus said to his disciples “I WILL PERMIT YOU TO DO SOME OF WHAT WAS FORBIDDEN TO YOU FORMERLY” – 3:50. It was forbidden to eat the meat of the pig under the Law of Moses (Tawrat), and all the verses quoted in the question come from or are based on, this Tawrat. But when Jesus came with the Gospel (Injil), he gave permission to his disciples to eat any kind of meat – (of course we are not going to eat anything that is physically harmful!). Jesus said “There is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him..... For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting..... All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man”. – Mark 7:15 and 21-23; cf. Acts of Apostles 10:9-16, 1 Timothy 4:3-5.

**QUESTION 11: Is God Himself the author of the Bible? If it is God who wrote the Bible, please tell me whether God was feeling cold, when He wrote asking Timothy to bring His cloak which He had left behind? (II Timothy 4:13).**

**ANSWER:** We do believe that the Bible was written by the inspiration of God. But in our view, God’s inspiration of His prophets and messengers does not mean that God is merely using them as a kind of “loudspeaker”, in which case the thinking of the messenger would have no part in the formulation of the message. (The loudspeaker simply transmits a voice and does not think for itself!).

According to the Christian view, there is no necessity for the inspired writer of Holy Scripture to go into a trance, or to see an Angel, or to receive a book sent down from heaven; more often it is that God guides his whole thought and experience in order to give him a clear understanding of God’s purposes. Thus what the author writes down as a message from God will come through his own heart and mind, and yet will be truly the Word of God. Therefore we know that the Apostle Paul was feeling cold, not God! But through all of Paul’s experiences (maybe even through his feeling cold), God was giving to Paul a revelation and understanding of His word so that Paul might transmit God’s word to us.

**QUESTION 12: Why is your Bible not as full as the Bible used by Catholics?**

**ANSWER:** In the Bible as used by Catholics there is an additional section called “Apocrypha” in between the New Testament and the Old Testament. Other Christians may also read the Apocrypha, only we print it as a separate book, we do not bind it together with the Bible. This Apocrypha gives some additional examples and lessons of godly conduct, but it does not teach the foundations of Christian faith as do the Old and New Testaments. So whether it is printed together or separately makes no important difference to Christian belief.

**QUESTION 13: Why do you Christians make changes in the Bible?**

**ANSWER:** Many Muslims have sought to interpret the Qur’an into other languages – sometime by printed translations, sometimes in the course of oral teaching. Could you say that every Muslim translating the Qur’an into English uses exactly the same words? Certainly not! And this does not mean that some of these translations are wrong. Rather, it is because very often one word can have two or three different interpretations, and it is very hard to know the one which is most correct in each case; sometimes, alternative translations may be equally correct.

The Bible was written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, and scholars in these languages are always pressing on to get a better understanding of them. Again scholars are continually thinking how to translate the Bible into a language which is most appropriate to modern times. You must know that the English language as spoken today is very different from ancient English. So the modern “New English Bible” is more easily understood today than the “Authorised Version”, written hundreds of years ago.

Further, all ancient copies of the Bible, before the invention of printing, were written by hand as “manuscripts”. Anyone copying scriptures by hand, whether the Qur’an or the Bible, cannot help making errors from time to time. So in the case of both Bible and Qur’an, very careful work had to be done to find the most reliable Version wherever there was a difference between one manuscript and another. It is through the comparison of many manuscripts or “readings” that the present texts of bible and Qur’an we obtained.

So when Christians bring out new “versions” of the Bible, it is not that we are “changing the Bible”! What we are doing is making sure that we have thoroughly reliable translations through which the Word of God may be easily understood.

**QUESTION 14: Is it true that Christians have erased the name of Muhammad from the Bible?**

**ANSWER:** By the time that Muhammad lived, there were many thousands of copies of the bible scattered about the world in many different languages. Even if Christians had (at that time or after) wished to make some changes in the bible, they could not possibly have collected all the copies in order to make such a change. In fact no one has ever seen any copy of the Bible in which the name of Muhammad is included.

Indeed the Qur’an itself bears witness to the Tawrat and Injil (Law of Moses and Gospel) which were in the hands of Jews and Christians at the time of Muhammad. The Qur’an testifies that they were the true Word of God (Qur’an 3:3; 5: 68; 10:94). But many early copies of the Bible, that were in the hands of Christians before and during the time of

Muhammad, are still in existence up to the present day, and agree with our present Bible. So we can say with confidence that the Bible to which the Qur'an bears witness is available for study today.

Some Muslims have been confused by a forged "gospel of Barnabas", in which it is true that the name of Muhammad is mentioned. This book was never a part of the bible, nor was it written by the Apostle Barnabas. It was written long after the time of Muhammad, and there is no record of any copy of it till about 1500 A.D., when it was "discovered" written in Italian. It should not be confused with the *Epistle* of Barnabas which is a genuine early document, though likewise never part of the Bible. The *Epistle* says nothing about Muhammad.

**QUESTION 15: "when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away" – 1 Cor. 13:10; cf. Hebrew 6:1. Do not these verses show that the Bible is imperfect and that a perfect scripture will come after it – i.e. the Qur'an?**

**ANSWER:** 1 Cor. 13: 8-13 tells us that man's knowledge must remain imperfect while he is in this world. But in the world to come, that imperfect knowledge will pass away (verse 8), for godly people will then see God face to face (verse 12) and will understand fully as God understands us. The conclusion is that we must not boast of our knowledge or spiritual gifts in this world – it is only faith, hope and love which "abide".

Thus the passage has nothing to do with Bible and Qur'an, nor with the comparison of Islam and Christianity.

The questioner has made the mistake of picking a verse out of its context, instead of reading it together with the verses before and after. He seems to be taking a verse here and there for the sake of argument, rather than genuinely seeking to understand the Word of God.

Similarly when Hebrews 6:1 says (Authorised Version) that we should "leave the principle of the doctrine of Christ" and "go on to perfection" this cannot possibly mean that we should reject the teaching of Christ as imperfect and replace it by the teaching of a later prophet! Just look again at the rest of verse one. The "principle" which the writer says we should "leave" is repentance and faith towards God. Is it possible that the Bible is telling us we have no more need of repentance and faith in God? A Muslim could never agree to this!

"Principle" is an old English word for "first principles" or "elementary levels"; the author means that he is tired of constantly repeating the elementary teaching which his readers should have understood long ago, and he wants to go on to advanced instructions suitable to the mature Christian.

## **QUESTIONS ABOUT JESUS**

**QUESTION 16: Was Jesus a thief, when he allowed his disciples to pluck and eat ears of corn from the field – Matthew 12: 1-2? Or when he sent the disciples to steal a donkey – Matthew 21: 1-3 and 6-7?**

**ANSWER:** Deut. 23: 25 shows that when the disciples took the ears of corn this was not stealing, it was fully permissible by the laws of their religion and of their nation. The Jewish leaders complained only because they took the corn ON THE SABBATH DAY, a day of rest.

Luke 19: 33-34 and Mark 11:6 (“and they let them go”) show that the disciples unloosed the donkey in the presence of its owner and with their permission. Furthermore Jesus and his disciples did this so that the prophecy of Zechariah (9:9) might be fulfilled. The Qur’an itself bears witness that Jesus was “one of the righteous” (3:46). How can any Muslim contradict the Qur’an by calling Jesus a thief?

**QUESTION 17: Why did Jesus abuse his mother? He called her “woman”, and he said to her “What have you to do with me?” – John 2:1-11.**

**ANSWER:** The Qur’an itself shows Muslims that Jesus could not have abused his mother, for it represents him as saying (God has made me) respectful to my mother, and has not made me arrogant” – 19:32.

Every race has its own different customs, and it was the custom of Jews and of the Greek language for a man to address his mother politely as “woman”. This is clear from John 19: 25-27, where Jesus is dying on the Cross and thinking compassionately of the mother whom he is leaving bereaved; once again he calls her “woman”.

I do admit that “what have you to do with me?” may seem like abuse in some other languages, but if you read carefully the rest of the story you will see that Jesus’s mother was not at all offended by the saying, rather she expected that Jesus would do what she had asked him (verse 5). Then we see that what Jesus did that day was in order to manifest the glory of God (verse 11) in such a way as to lead many to believe in him. If Jesus’s words had been abusive, they could not possibly have had these effects. So Jesus’s words can only mean “*your thoughts are different from mine. You are concerned that those who prepared the feast should not be put to shame; but my own concern must be to manifest the glory of God when ‘my hour has come’.*”

**QUESTION 18: Was Jesus sent as a messenger to the children of Israel only? In Matthew 10: 5-6 Jesus said, “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”.**

**ANSWER:** In order to see that Jesus was sent for the salvation of the whole world, see Matthew 28: 18-19, where Jesus said “ALL AUTHORITY IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of ALL NATIONS.....”; and Jesus said in Luke 24: 47, “that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached to his (Jesus’s) name to ALL NATIONS, beginning from Jerusalem”.

Why then did Jesus once say “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans”? You should know that Matthew 10: 1-5 is the first occasion on which Jesus sent his disciples out to preach. On this particular occasion he wanted them to concentrate on preaching to the house of Israel, according to the saying that “charity begins at home” (We sweep inside of the house first). But this is not to say that on all future occasions the disciples should preach only to Israelites. Luke 9:52 shows that on a later occasion Jesus did send his disciples to a village of the Samaritans. Also, Jesus himself preached to the woman of Samaria and her fellow country-men, and lived with them for two days. So even in his lifetime, we can see that Jesus was not concerned with the Jews alone. But it is after his death and his resurrection that the time becomes ripe for a world-wide proclamation of salvation.

The Qur'an describes Jesus several times as a messenger and an example to the Children of Israel (3:49; 43:59), but it nowhere says that he was sent only to the children of Israel. In fact it describes Jesus as "a sign to all the worlds" (ayatan li-l-' alamin) and "a sign to mankind" (21:91 and 19:21).

**QUESTION 19: Some Muslims accuse Jesus of despising people of other races, in that he said to the Canaanite woman, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel", and "it is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" – Matthew 15: 21-28)**

**ANSWER:** To demonstrate that Jesus did not despise people of other races, see how he healed the Samaritan leper (Luke 17: 11-19), and the servant of the Roman Centurion (Matthew 8: 5-13). He praised non-Israelite people, saying that their faith surpassed that of the children of Israel and that many of them would enter the Kingdom of heaven, while many Israelites would be cast out (Matthew 8:10-12 cf. Luke 10: 13-14). He told the parable of the Good Samaritan, whose kindness put some selfish Israelites to shame (Luke 10: 29-37).

We must interpret the story of Matthew 15: 21-28 in accordance with all these other references. Jesus required faith from those he was going to heal and in various ways he used to test their faith (Matthew 9:22 and 28-29). Jesus was testing this Canaanite woman, as though to say "You know that my fellow-Israelites usually call you puppy dogs. Do you really believe that I, an Israelite, am going to help you?" The woman's answer showed that she really appreciated Jesus's goodness and power; wittily she replied, "Call me a puppy if you like; even puppies get scraps from the master's table! I just believe that you are going to help me and heal my daughter." And Jesus didn't despise or reject her, he praised her faith and made her daughter well.

**QUESTION 20: Did Jesus wear a turban? If so, why do Christians not wear the same? See Zech. 3: 3-5; Ezek. 24:17.**

**ANSWER:** It is not recorded in the Bible or elsewhere that Jesus wore a turban. However, since this is a very common head-dress in Eastern lands, it seems probable that Jesus sometimes wore one. So when we draw pictures of Jesus we sometimes show him with a turban.

This does not mean that Jesus was a Muslim; a Christian may wear a turban, especially in a hot and dusty country, and Muslims may wear any other kind of headgear. It is only a matter of custom. The Christian religion is not wearing the same clothes as Jesus Christ wore, but trusting Him and obeying Him.

The verses quoted from Zechariah and Ezekiel simply report that on a certain occasion, or in certain vision, someone or other wore a turban. They do not make any law about it.

**QUESTION 21: Jesus prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, "Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup (of suffering and death) from me" – Luke 22:42. Also Heb. 5:7 shows that Jesus "offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death and he was heard for his godly fear". These verses show that God did not permit Jesus to suffer death on the Cross.**

**ANSWER:** Please do not stop short in the middle of the verse, but read on to the continuation of Jesus prayer; “nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done”. The Bible teaches that God wished Jesus to die for us sinners (Isaiah 53 verse 5 & 10-12; Mark 8: 31; 10:45).

Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane shows that he had the natural human desire to escape suffering if possible – but above all he was ready to do what his heavenly Father wished, and so he went to meet his enemies and allowed them to take his life. He freely sacrificed himself to fulfill God’s plan (Mark 15:24; 37 and 39; John 10:11; 17-18).

The Epistle to the Hebrews teaches clearly that Jesus died, e.g. 13:20. “Now may the God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus....” What then does Hebrews 5:7 mean? Certainly God did “hear” Jesus’s prayer and “save him from death”. But God saved Jesus, not by preventing him from dying – but by *allowing him to die and then raising him up out of death.*

**QUESTION 22: Since the disciples fled at the time when Jesus was taken prisoner, they were not eye-witnesses to his crucifixion. Don’t you believe then that it was someone else crucified there instead of Jesus? Or perhaps if it was Jesus, that he only fainted on the Cross and was taken down still alive?**

**ANSWER:** It is true that at first the disciples fled (Matthew 26:56). But afterwards they followed Jesus far off, and from afar they saw how he died on the Cross (Matthew 26:58 and 27:55, Luke 23:48-49), and how his dead body was taken down and placed in the grave (Matthew 27: 56-61). Afterwards the disciples testified to what they had seen (John 19:30-35; Acts 10:39). Also Jesus Christ testified that it was he himself who had suffered on the Cross, and had risen from the dead (Luke 24: 39 & 44-48).

The story that Jesus “only fainted” represents Jesus as a liar, when he declared himself to have risen from the dead. No Muslims can accept that!

**QUESTION 23: Is it in accordance with justice that an innocent man should die for sinners? A proverb says that the finger which has done wrong is the one to be cut off with a knife. Ezekiel 18:20 says, “the soul that sins shall die, the son shall not bear (suffer for) the iniquity of the father....”**

**ANSWER:** (i) Many examples from everyday life show that one person may die to save another, even that an innocent person may suffer in place of the guilty: This is no strange experience for us.

(ii) But certainly if we are thinking of our guilt before God, there is no created being who can bear the guilt of another. This is what Ezekiel is saying.

(iii) But Jesus Christ is different from created beings. He is the one whom God chose to be the only Mediator between God and man, He is the “Righteous Servant” of whom it was prophesied that he would pour out his soul unto death, in order to bear the sins of many others (I Timothy 2:5; Isaiah 53:11-12; Mark 10:45). Jesus is the one who can take away the guilt of our sin because he himself is sinless. (I Peter 2: 22-24)

**QUESTION 24: Jesus did not willingly allow himself to be killed, for he sent his disciples to buy sword in order to fight.**

**ANSWER:** If we tell anyone to “gird up his loins, we are speaking a parable, we don’t actually mean that the man should tie a girdle about himself; we mean that the man should “be prepared”. Similarly Jesus is speaking a parable when he says “let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one” (Luke 22:36); for in the first place it was mid-night, and there was nowhere for them to go and literally buy a sword at that time; further when one disciple drew his sword and cut off the ear of one of the enemies, Jesus immediately told him to put back the sword in its place – “for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matthew 26: 51-52).

So the meaning of Jesus’s parable is that the disciples should be prepared to endure danger and suffering. When the disciples didn’t understand this, and said that they already had two swords, Jesus replied, “it is enough”. This does not mean two swords were sufficient to defend themselves against all the Roman Soldiers! It simply means “be quiet” or “don’t talk nonsense”. (Luke 22:38).

**QUESTION 25: When Jesus Christ comes back to the world, do you believe that he will perform the Muslim Prayers, observe the fast of the Ramadhan, kill all the pigs, become the father of a family, die and be buried at the side of the Prophet Medina?**

**ANSWER:** No, there is no such statement in the Bible, there is not even any such statement in the Qur’an. These are simply Muslim Traditions (Hadith) about the Mahdi who will come to proclaim the last day. Some Muslims interpret Mahdi to be the same as Jesus.

The Bible does witness that Jesus will return again, but this is not to live a human life as ours, rather he is to be the judge of the living and the dead. He will tread all evil under his feet, and he will bring his faithful and true followers to eternal glory. The Qur’an also testifies that God will raise those who follow Jesus above those who disbelieve, until the day of resurrection (3:55). Therefore it is important both for Muslims and Christians to examine the evidence carefully, in order to know how we should truly follow Jesus.

**QUESTION 26: Was Jesus speaking about Muhammad when he mentioned the Comforter?**

**ANSWER:** Before this question can be settled, it is essential to read all that Jesus said about the Comforter; it is not sufficient to choose two or three verses only. So please read John Chapter 14, verses 16-17 & 26; chapter 15, verse 26; chapter 16, verses 7-15. It is only if all of these verses can apply to Muhammad that we could say Muhammad is the Comforter.

(i) John 14:26 says that the Comforter whom Jesus said he would send is the Holy Spirit. But the Qur’an, traditions (Hadith) and Commentaries (Tafsir) never called Muhammad the Holy Spirit. It is only an invention of Muslims of recent times, to give him that title. In the Qur’an the “Holy Spirit” is said to have been with Jesus during his time on earth – long before Muhammad was even born.

(ii) In John 14:17 Jesus says to the disciples (Peter etc.) that the Comforter already dwells with them and will come to dwell in them; but Muhammad had not been born at that time, so who could say that Muhammad was dwelling in Peter and his companions?

(iii) John 15:26 says that Jesus will send the Comforter from God the Father, yet Muhammad never said that he came from God the Father (see Question 31), or that it was Jesus who had sent him.

Here are the true facts about the Comforter: The Holy Spirit had been at work since the beginning of time (Genesis 1:2; Psalm 51:11; John 4:24). But Jesus prophesied that after his resurrection this Holy Spirit would come into the world afresh, in a new way, as the Comforter, and would fill men's hearts completely with the power of God. This prophecy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost or "Whit Sunday", see Acts of the Apostles Chapter 1-4.

## **QUESTIONS ABOUT SON OF GOD**

**QUESTION 27: "Creator of the heavens and the earth! How can He have a son when He has no wife?" Qur'an 6:101) Has God any son?**

**ANSWER:** When we speak of a son we are not always thinking of a son born by the coming together of a male and female. For example, some people in Africa are called son of a leopard, this is a nickname by which we show our hope that the child will have the courage and strength of a leopard. It does not mean that the leopard married a wife and begot this baby leopard!

So we want to re-assure Muslims that certainly God has never got a child in the way that men do through relationship with a woman. Such an idea is as blasphemous and ridiculous to us, as it is to Muslims. See Luke 1: 26-35 ("She was with child by the Holy spirit" means that she conceived through the incomprehensible power of God).

This is clearly seen in the Arabic language. There are two ways of expressing "son" in Arabic and the meanings of the two words are different.

One is WALAD, the other is IBN. The word WALAD stands for one who is begotten by female and male, so Christians are completely convinced that God has no WALAD and they can even agree with the word of the Qur'an (112) LAM YALID WA LAM YULAD, and Christians can never call Jesus WALADDU'LLAH.

But the word IBN can mean "Son" as a kind of metaphor or parable. For example the Arabs call a traveller IBNU'SSABIL (Son of the road – not meaning that the road married and begot!); so Christians call Jesus IBNU'LLAH (Son of God – but not meaning that God took a wife).

What is the meaning of this remarkable title?

(i) Very often in everyday life, we say a son is "*the image of his father*"; by this we refer not merely to physical appearance but to character and behavior. Jesus himself said "he who has seen me has seen the Father", and the Bible calls Jesus "the image of the invisible God" (John 14:9; Col. 1:15) referring, of course, not to physical appearance but to character.

(ii) In everyday life we expect the son to have *a unique intimate knowledge of his father*, and we expect the son to be obedient to his father's wishes. Jesus said "no one knows (God) the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the son chooses to reveal Him". And again, "I do

nothing on my own authority... I always do what is pleasing to Him (the Father)” – Matthew 11:27; John 8: 28-29.

(iii) when a king wishes to choose a Representative who is greater than all his chiefs and counselors, he may send his son, in the expectations that people will give the same honour to the son that they would give to the father (Mark 12: 1-9). Jesus is *the unique representative of God* among men to the point where he could say “he who does not honour the son, does not honour the Father who sent him” and “he who believes in me, believes not in me, but in Him who sent me” (John 5:23; 12:44).

**QUESTION 28: Did Christians of their own accord call Jesus Son of God, or did Jesus give this title to himself?**

**ANSWER:** Christian did not make up tis title! It is Jesus who first knew himself as Son of God, for:-

(i) Twice Jesus saw the heaven opened and heard the voice of God saying, “thou art my beloved son” (Luke 3:22; 9:35).

(ii) When Peter testified to Jesus, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”, Jesus did not deny this title, but congratulated Peter “blessed are you... for it is not flesh and blood that revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 16: 16-17).

(iii) Frequently Jesus called on God as Father (e.g. Luke 23 verse 34 and 46) and spoke of himself as the Son (cf. Question 27; see also John 5: 17-27 and 10:36).

**QUESTION 29: Jesus always called himself “Son of Man”. Does this not contradict his being Son of God?**

**ANSWER:** These titles do not at all contradict one another. If you carefully read Daniel 7:13-14; Mark 8:38, and 14:61-62 you will see that the title Son of Man does not stand for a man like ourselves, it stands for an eternal being who comes to the world from the right hand of God, full of God’s glory. This meaning is quite in agreement with the title Son of God.

**QUESTION 30: But very many people are called son of God in the Bible. God called the children of Israel his “son” in Hosea 11:1-2 and every Christian is called son of God in John 1:12. Or does this mean that Jesus is just a person like ourselves?**

**ANSWER:** It is true that God called the children of Israel, especially the Israelite Kings, to walk closely with Himself and to be his representative and image in the world. Likewise in the beginning, God called Adam to be a “son of God” (Luke 3:38).

But all of these failed to live up to the standard of a son of God; through their disobedience they fell short and lost his exalted position.

The true and perfect Son was eternally one with the Father in heaven (see Question 34); he came to earth, born of a woman, to share our human life and death, for our salvation. His character and deeds showed that he, uniquely, is worthy to be called Son of God.

But those who trust in him, although unworthy, receive a share in his sonship – God “adopts” us as sons.

**QUESTION 31: Why do you call yourself sons of God, when the Bible calls you slaves of God – Romans 6:22?**

**ANSWER:** To show clearly that the Bible calls Christians sons of God, see the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:45 – “that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven”. See also John 1:12- “to all who received him, who believed in his name, he (Jesus) gave power to become children of God”, and Romans 8: 15-16: “You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship, by which we cry Abba, Father”. As we pointed out in question 27, this is metaphorical language, it is not that God begot as we humans do.

Why then does the Epistle to the Romans, the same book of the Bible, also refer to the Christians as slaves or servants? The reason is that human experience and human language is not enough to describe the truth of God exactly. It is true that our position before God may be compared to the position of a slave *up to a certain point*. In Romans 6:16, the Apostle Paul points out that a slave must be completely obedient to his master. So he uses slavery as a metaphor for obedience. He says we should not be the slaves of sin, rather we should be slaves of righteousness (verse 18), or even we may be called “slaves of God” – (verse 22).

This means that Christians do not completely reject the idea that we may be called slaves of God in certain senses, i.e. to indicate humility, and obedience to God. But we insist that this title is not sufficient to represent the whole truth about God. In this world, the master of slaves may be kind or may be cruel, but Jesus revealed the deep love which God has towards us which far surpasses anything that we expect from the master of slaves. The slave serves his master in fear, by compulsion, but Jesus taught us that we should willingly and joyfully serve God as our Father.

However, we wish to re-assure Muslims that we are not presuming to exalt ourselves when we call ourselves sons; it is God whom we are exalting and praising. We realize that we are unworthy sinful beings, but we proclaim the great mercy by which God stooped down to receive us as His sons, because of our trust in Jesus Christ.

**QUESTION 32: Are Christians not worshipping three Gods? – the Father as one God, the Son second, and the Holy Spirit as a third God?**

**ANSWER:** Definitely there is only one God and he alone should be worshipped. Everyone who is baptised as a Christian must learn the Ten Commandments, beginning “God spoke all these words saying, I am the Lord your God... YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GOD BESIDES ME.....” (Exodus 20:2-3).

Jesus himself emphasized this, repeating “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Mark 12:29). Likewise the apostle Paul wrote “we know that an idol has no real existence and that there is no God but one” I Corinthians 8:4). But what is the nature of this one God? How can man know Him? The Bible teaches us that *the one God manifests himself* (in so far as man can know Him) *in three ways, that is, as our FATHER who is in Heaven* (Matthew 6:9); *as the SON or WORD who reveals the Father* (John 14: 8-10, John 1, verses 1, 14, 18); *and as the HOLY SPIRIT who performs the work of God on earth* (John 4:24; Romans 8:16 and 26).

God is incomprehensible. “The scar is never the same as the original smooth skin”; there is no explanation which can make the being of God comprehensible to man. Particularly we must not imagine that God can be counted, as for example money is counted. For example, we hear the argument that since  $1+1+1 = 3$ , we should not say that the three (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) can be one God. (Suppose we multiply instead of adding? What is the answer to  $1 \times 1 \times 1$ ?) But the point is that a God who could be added or multiplied would no longer be God.

Christian theologians have done what they could to explain how God can be triune – three in one, and these explanations are useful especially to protect our faith against misunderstanding or misinterpretation. For example, the doctrine of the Trinity warns us not to regard Jesus as another God besides God, and warns us not to think that God changes from one thing to another like a masquerader changing his costumes, or like a spirit changing into a man. In so far as Islam itself is equally opposed to these ideas, the doctrine of the Trinity should be a reassurance to Muslims, if only it is properly explained to them.

Of course the actual word “Trinity” is not in the Bible – just as the word “Unity” (Tawhid) is not in the Qur’an! The Bible testifies that the One God exists, and reveals Himself, as Father, Word and Spirit; the doctrine of the Trinity is merely an attempt to summarize and explain what the Bible says.

**QUESTION 33: When Jesus was baptised in the River Jordan; and the Spirit of God descended upon him like a dove, and God spoke from heaven (Matthew 3:16-17), how could God be in three different places (if Jesus and the Spirit are God)?**

**ANSWER:** There is no difficulty in this. Islam itself teaches that we must not compare God with man. A man can only be in one place at any one time, but God is certainly not limited as we are. God is everywhere, and there is no difficulty for Him to be revealing Himself in three ways in three places at the same time. Even if it were more than three places, who is to limit God?

**QUESTION 34: Is Jesus God?**

**ANSWER:** There is one God, and the one God alone is to be worshipped. But the Bible testifies that the one God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ in a wonderful and incomparable way, to such a point that whoever has seen Jesus had seen God the Father. The fullness of God dwells in Jesus Christ. Jesus and the Father are one. Jesus is in the Father and the Father is in Him.<sup>5</sup>

Look at the many things which Jesus did, such as no created being could do; only God has the right to do these things. Jesus gives men the forgiveness of their sins, he amends the Law which God gave through Moses, he is the one who holds all authority in heaven and on earth, he is the one who judges on the last day.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John 4:9; Col. 1:19; 2:9; John 10:30 and 38

<sup>6</sup> Forgiveness – Mark 2, 1-12; Acts 10:42-43.  
Amending the Law – Matthew 5:38-39;  
Authority – Matthew 28:18;  
The Judge – Matthew 25:31-46; Acts 10:42.

Seeing that no created being can do such things, we believe that it is God Himself who is doing them in Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup> So the worship that we give to Jesus does not take anything away from the glory of God, rather we are giving glory to God through Jesus, it is for the sake of God that we worship Jesus Christ (Phil. 2: 10-11 – “that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow to the glory of God the Father”).

It is in this sense that the eyes of Thomas were opened after the resurrection of Jesus, so that he cried to Jesus “My Lord and my God”; and Jesus confirmed this testimony by saying, “because you have seen me you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe” (John 20: 28-29).

Certainly there are various false meanings which could be given in error to the phrase “Jesus is God” – for example some might think that when Jesus was born, this means God Himself was being born, or that on the day when Jesus died God Himself was dying! This is certainly a mis-interpretation of the Christian belief. The correct interpretation is as we have said above.

Or to put it another way: the word of a man is mysterious. Where is my word before it comes out of my mouth? We say it is in my heart or my head. But if a surgeon operates on my heart and brain, will he find my words there? It is hard to make a distinction between me and my word –if someone says he believes my word, he means simply that he believes me!

That is only an illustration; how much more mysterious is the WORD of GOD! Before the WORD comes from the “mouth” of God, where is it? *In the beginning* the WORD was with God, the WORD is not just a created thing. Whatever God does, we may say that it is His WORD which does it. If a man says that he trusts in God’s WORD he means simply that he trusts in God Himself, through the Word.

So we see that God and His WORD are almost one and the same.<sup>8</sup> The One and only God, whom we know as Father, has also revealed Himself as WORD, to the point where the Bible can say “and the WORD was God”... and at the time God chose, this WORD came among us in human body, living a human life, for our salvation, namely, the Man Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> This is precisely what we mean when we testify, “JESUS IS GOD”. . . . . . Once again, please do not misunderstand it: when Christians call Jesus “God”, we are not taking him to be any kind of a second God beside God; and we are not denying that he lived a fully human life on earth.

We mean simply that Jesus is the INCARNATION (the coming into human life) of the WORD, which is GOD. Thus when we worship Jesus, it is the one and only God whom we know and worship through *His Word*.

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<sup>7</sup> 2 Corinthians 5: 17-19

<sup>8</sup> Islam has a somewhat similar doctrine of the “speech” of God being eternal and uncreated.

<sup>9</sup> John 1:1 and 14, cf. Hebrews 1: 1-2.

