

Why Christianity Over Other Religions? How Does Islam Resolve the Problem of Sin?

Introduction:

Ever since the rise of Islam in the early 7th century there has been antagonism between it and Christianity. This is due to fundamental theological differences that create an impasse between the two systems of thought. While the differences are many, this presentation focuses mainly on the question of sin and how each belief system seeks to resolve the problem. As we will note, this one question presents an unbridgeable impasse between the two theologies.

1. How Does Islam View Sin and Its Resolution?

A. Islam believes that man sins, but the resolution of those sins does not require atonement. Acceptance of Allah and good works are the solution to transgression.

1. “And as for those who believe and do good works, He will pay them their wages in full” (*Surah 4:173*). “O ye who believe! If ye keep your duty to Allah, He will give you discrimination and will rid you of your evil thoughts and deeds, and will forgive you. Allah is of infinite bounty” (*Surah 8:29*). “And those who believed and did good works are made to enter the Gardens underneath which rivers flow...” (*Surah 14:23*).
2. “And those who believe and do good works and believe in that which is revealed unto Muhammad – and it is the truth from their Lord – He riddeth them of their ill-deeds...” (*Surah 47:2*). “And as for those who believe and do good works, We shall remit from them their evil deeds and shall repay them the best that they did... And as for those who believe and do good works, We verily shall make them enter in among the righteous” (*Surah 29:6-7, 9*).
3. Recent message board at King’s Cross Station: “Hadith of the day: The Prophet Muhammad (*PBUM*) said: “All the sons of Adam are sinners, but the best of the sinners are those who repent often.”

B. Related to the matter of atonement, Islam holds that Jesus did not die by crucifixion at the instigation of unbelieving Jews. Rather, Islam holds this Bible teaching to be blasphemous. God has never allowed one of His prophets to be treated in such a disrespectful way.

1. “Because of their saying: We slew the Messiah Jesus son of Mary, Allah’s messenger – They slew him not nor crucified, but it appeared so unto them...” (*Surah 4:157-158*).
2. Hammudah Abdalati (Syracuse professor): “The Muslim cannot entertain the dramatic story of Jesus’ death upon the cross just to do away with all human sins once and for all... The Muslim does not believe in the crucifixion of Jesus by his enemies because the basis of this doctrine of crucifixion is contrary to Divine mercy and justice as much as it is to human reason and dignity. Such a disbelief in the doctrine does not in any way lessen... the Muslim’s belief in Jesus as a distinguished prophet of God. On the contrary, by rejecting this doctrine the Muslim accepts Jesus but only with more esteem and higher respect, and looks upon his original message as an essential part of Islam” (*Islam in Focus* (1975), quoted in *Understanding the Times* 61).
3. Obviously, if Jesus was not killed He was not resurrected.

- C. Islam holds Jesus to be a great prophet but subordinate to Muhammad. Further, Islam's conviction of monotheism – "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet" – leads to the denial of the deity of Jesus.
1. "O people of the Scripture! [Christians] Come to an agreement between us and you: that we shall worship none but Allah, and that we shall ascribe no partner unto Him, and that none of us shall take others for lords beside Allah" (*Surah 3:64*). "And behold! Allah will say: 'O Jesus the son of Mary! Did you say to men, "worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah"?' He will say: 'Glory to You! Never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, You would indeed have known it. You know what is in my heart, though I do not know what is in Yours... Never said I to them anything except what You commanded me to say, to wit, "Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord" (*Surah 5:116-117*).
 2. "Praise be to Allah Who hath revealed the Scripture unto His slave... to give warning of stern punishment from Him... and to warn those who say: Allah hath chosen a son. (A thing) whereof they have no knowledge, nor (had) their fathers. Dreadful is the word that cometh out of their mouths. They speak naught but a lie" (*Surah 18:1-5*).
 3. "And they say: The Beneficent hath taken unto Himself a son. Assuredly ye utter a disastrous thing, whereby almost the heavens are torn, and the earth is split asunder and the mountains fall in ruins, that ye ascribe unto the Beneficent a son, when it is not meet for (the Majesty of) the Beneficent that He should choose a son. There is none in the heavens and the earth but cometh unto the Beneficent as a slave" (*Surah 19:88-93*).
- D. Conclusion: We do not need repeated quotations; these affirm commonly held beliefs regarding Islam and Christianity. As previously noted, these are doctrinal essentials that neither side can relinquish and still hold themselves faithful to their belief system.

2. Five Main Theses Concerning Atonement Through the Death of Jesus

- A. God always tied the atonement of sin to the shedding of blood of a sin-sacrifice.
1. Animal sacrifices predated the Law of Moses, but Leviticus 17:11 clarifies: "*For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.*"
 2. Further, Hebrews 9:22: "*And according to the Law almost all things are purged with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.*"
 3. The problem with animal sacrifices, however, is that by virtue of animal blood alone no actual remission is possible – Hebrews 10:1-4. This is not an unintended "flaw" but rather God's intent to educate mankind before providing the real atonement for sin.
- B. The Old Testament prophets foretold of the coming and death of the anointed one.
1. Isaiah 53 and Psalms 22 are primary prophecies of the Christ's death.
 2. But note Jesus' own prophetic statements as the time nears: "*From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day*" (Matthew 16:21; cf. Mark 8:31; 9:10, 31).

3. Further, after His death/resurrection He chides unbelieving disciples: “*O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself*” (Luke 24:25-27). The death of Jesus was not unplanned and unforeseen by God.
- C. Jesus declared Himself to be both deity and the ultimate, adequate sacrifice for sin.
1. There are various acknowledgments both by Old Testament prophets, Jesus and apostles/prophets of the New Testament that identify Jesus as divine, or Immanuel, “God with us.” For the sake of time we will not thoroughly explore this, but one of the plainest statements is Jesus’ appropriation of God’s description of Himself: “*Before Abraham was, I AM*” (John 8:58). John has developed this theme throughout his gospel: “*The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God*” (1:1).
 2. To a Muslim this is blasphemy; to Christians it is the ultimate truth that God had to offer for sin what we could not offer ourselves – Himself: “*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (Matthew 20:28).
 3. Christ came “*not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God. And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance*” (Hebrews 9:12-15).
- D. Man’s meritorious works alone are inadequate to remove the guilt/consequence of sin.
1. Paul (whom Muslims consider the “corrupter” of Christianity) wrote that “*the wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23). Sin incurs the penalty of banishment from God unless a resolution is provided that satisfies God’s justice; i.e., atonement. Man cannot atone for himself as all that he is/has belongs to God in the first place. “Doing good” cannot satisfy the penalty of death, and animal sacrifice (or money, or firstborn) is only giving back to God what is already His.
 2. Jesus is repeatedly in the New Testament described as this very solution to the problem of sin and the penalty of death (cf. Romans 3:23-26). This is said to be by God’s grace since He wasn’t compelled to provide such a sacrifice – Ephesians 2:4-10. Our good works follow our salvation and are the result of our gratitude and indebtedness to God for His gift.
- E. That sacrifice is appropriated by complete faith and trust in Christ that yields all – will, actions, ambitions, emotions, service and hope – to God in view of Christ’s sacrifice.

1. Paul phrases it this way: *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me”* (Galatians 2:20).
2. Paul further describes His devotion: *“I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead”* (Philippians 3:8-11).

3. Conclusion

- A. It is the hope of every Christian that the world would confess its sin and see that Christ is the only answer for overcoming the judicial guilt of that sin. If we would but live for Christ, the violence and treachery of this world would evaporate and be replaced by love.
- B. But Christians are the ultimate realists; we know that, as Jesus said, *“wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it”* (Matthew 7:13). The world as a whole will never accept Christ, and while it grieves the heart of the Christian we accept that this is our reality while we live on earth.
- C. As to this particular lesson, we hope and pray for peace between Christians and radical Islamists, respecting the differences that exist and not fighting a spiritual battle with carnal weapons. God is calling all of us to peace, and that can be achieved by mutual understanding and respect even when we disagree on fundamental theological issues.
- D. Christians understand that faith cannot be forced; it is for each man/woman to examine what they believe to be true and then face God’s judgment – not man’s – at the end of time.