

# Salvation and Islam

(by Bob Pulliam)

I think perhaps nearly all would agree that the greatest need for man is the forgiveness of God. We need many things, without a doubt. But we know that all of us will eventually make mistakes and displease the Creator. Forgiveness, then, is of primary importance in the overall scheme of things.

This article will attempt to compare the two major systems (Islam and Christianity) on the matter of forgiveness.

## ***The Means of Forgiveness in Islam...***

A few quotes will serve to start us off right here:

Sura 4:110 "If any one does evil or wrongs his own soul but afterwards seeks Allah's forgiveness, he will find Allah Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful."

Sura 39:53 "Say: 'O my servants who have transgressed against their souls! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah: for Allah forgives all sins: for He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.'"

No forgiveness for joining other gods with Allah:

Sura 4:116 "Allah forgiveth not (the sin or) joining other gods with Him; but He forgiveth whom He pleaseth other sins than this: one who joins other gods with Allah, hath strayed far, far away (from the Right)."

Sura 4:48 "Allah forgiveth not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgiveth anything else, to whom He pleaseth; to set up partners with Allah is to devise a sin most heinous indeed."

Forgiveness in Islam demands that one repent of his evil way, and pray to Allah for forgiveness. Forgiveness, then, is solely a matter of Allah overlooking sins that have been committed and repented of. There is no expiation of sin by a sacrifice that takes the place of the guilty party. In other words, the penalty for sin is never paid. When it is repented of, Allah just forgets about it.

## ***The Efficacy of Islam's System...***

Give thought to a few quotes on this matter:

"This believer wakens grieving and goes to bed grieving, and nothing encompasses him, for he is between two fearful things: between sin which has so possessed him that he knows not what God will do to him, and between his allotted term which so remains that he knows not what mortal thing may strike him. The good things have departed; only the reprehensible remains, and whoever is left among Muslims is afflicted." (Quoted in Islam, ed. J.A. Williams, p138)

Now one might think that this man is an isolated case; and yet, emphasize that last statement in your mind. He could see that his fellow Muslims were plagued with the same difficulty as he. Although Islam strives to provide its own assurances of forgiveness, there is still an emptiness.

Note this assurance given to Muslims:

'An incessant sinner has not sinned that he asked pardon, although he may have sinned seventy times a day, because asking pardon is a cover for sins. God has said, "Verily if you come before me with sins equal to the dust of the earth, and then come before me without associating anything with me, verily I will come before you with pardon equal to the dust of the earth.'" (Mishkat, Book X, Chapter II)

"Verily my heart is veiled with melancholy, and verily I ask pardon of God one hundred times." (Mishkat, Book X, Chapter III)

There is something inherently missing from Islam's system of Justification... It leaves an emptiness.

The answer given to all of this is that these writers were simply expressing their feelings of unworthiness, and lowliness. In humility they are confessing their dependance on God. They are indulging in more than humility, though. My "heart is veiled with melancholy" does not express humility. It expresses sorrow... deep sorrow. And in our first quote, we had these words: "The good things have departed; only the reprehensible remains, and whoever is left among Muslims is afflicted." That doesn't sound at all like praise for a system of forgiveness. But it does sound quite similar to despair!

### ***The Justice of God, and Sacrifice...***

As I read Islamic statements regarding the Bible and Jesus, it seems to be a common misconception that the Bible teaches that God just suddenly had Jesus slain as a sacrifice for sins. Such a view shows little understanding of the Bible doctrine of forgiveness and salvation. The Bible is very clear on the result and just penalty for sin...

Isa 59:1f "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear."

Rom 6:23 "The wages of sin is death..."

Ezk 18:4 "...the soul who sins shall die."

To make a long story short, the creature forfeits the life given by the Creator when it violates the Creator's mandates (law). Unlike Islam's view of forgiveness, the Bible teaches that if God were to simply overlook sin, and not provide the proper penalty, He would not be just:

Rom 3:25f "whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins

that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

Mankind had sinned, and the penalty for sin is death (Rom 6:23). God cannot overlook the penalty and be just. The penalty must be paid. But God wants to save mankind. Jesus became God's just means of handling the sins of the creature. This was accomplished by a blood sacrifice.

### ***Blood Sacrifice...***

Blood sacrifices have been offered from the beginning of time. The sacrifice of Cain and Abel is mentioned in the Quran (Sura 5:27). But the Quran explains sacrifice in this way: "It is not their meat nor their blood, that reaches Allah: it is your piety that reaches Him: He has thus made them subject to you, that ye may glorify Allah for His guidance to you..." (Sura 22:37) Muhammad thought he understood what the Bible taught on sacrifice; but he did not. Muslims now explain the disparity by claiming that the Bible has been changed (see *Is the Bible Accurate?*).

But why is the principle of sacrifice taught in the Bible? There must have been a reason for God to command all of these offerings! Was it just to glorify Him? The reason is found in...

Lev 17:11 "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."

Forgiveness! That which is sacrificed is given as a substitute for the one who has sinned. The life of the victim is in the blood, and the blood is poured out on the altar in place of taking the life of the one making the sacrifice.

In the New Testament we read that the blood of bulls and goats could not in fact accomplish this (Heb 10:1-4). (Note Rom 3:25f in this connection) Forgiveness in the Old Testament is spoken of in an accommodative manner, knowing that those sacrifices would be completed by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus. The sacrifices of the Old Testament were a temporary solution to a problem that was dealt with effectively by the New (Heb 9:13-15).

### ***The Sacrifice of God's Son...***

Did Jesus die for the sins of mankind? The Muslim says 'no'. But the Quran tells us to go to the people of the book and consult that which God had said in former times:

Sura 5:43f "But why do they come to thee for decision, when they have (their own) Torah before them?- Therein is the (plain) command of Allah; yet even after that, they would turn away. For they are not (really) people of Faith. It was We who revealed the Torah (to Moses): therein was guidance and light. By its standard have been judged the Jews, by the Prophets who bowed (as in Islam) to Allah's Will, by the Rabbis and the Doctors of Law: For to them was entrusted the protection of Allah's Book, and they were witnesses thereto: Therefore fear not men, but fear Me, and sell not My Signs for a miserable price. If any do fail to judge by what Allah hath revealed, they are unbelievers."

Sura 5:47 "Let the people of the Gospel judge by what Allah hath revealed therein. If any do fail to judge by what Allah hath revealed, they are those who rebel."

Sura 5:68 "Say: "O People of the Book! Ye have no ground to stand upon unless ye stand fast by the Torah. The Gospel, and all the revelation that has come to you from your Lord." It is the revelation that cometh to thee from thy Lord, that increaseth in most of them their obstinate Rebellion and blasphemy. But sorrow thou not over (these) people without Faith.""

Going to "the Book", we find that the sacrifice of Jesus for the sins of the world is clearly taught. Perhaps the most moving passage of the Old Testament is Isaiah 53. Note these excerpts:

"But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed." (v5)

"Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors." (v10ff)

Now if Jesus' death was not a sacrifice for atonement of sins, why was it foretold as such. You say this was added to coincide with "Christian doctrine"? Who added it, and when. These words are in the Septuagint version of the Bible which was translated around 250 BC. That's 250 years before the events prophesied. And Muhammad said that the people of his day had "the Book" which was trustworthy. We can compare what we have today with what was even before Muhammad's day, and it's the same! No one changed anything! Islam is in error when it says that Jesus did not die for the sins of mankind. Islam is in error when it charges the Bible with changes to accommodate this doctrine.

### ***One For All?...***

The point of one man's sacrifice being of benefit for the whole race is lost on the Muslim because he will not accept the identity of Jesus to begin with. The Muslim commonly complains about the idea of one man dying, and it being of any benefit to all mankind. If Jesus had been just a man, I might also wonder about this. But Jesus was not just another prophet of God. Jesus was not just another man in mankind.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made." (John 1:1ff)

Jesus is the creator. Jesus is God. He was, is, and forever shall be. The coming Messiah was prophesied to be God (Isa 9:6; Ps 45:6f). Jesus Himself claimed to be God:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death. Then the Jews said to Him, 'Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, "If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death." Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Whom do You make Yourself out to be?' Jesus answered, 'If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My

Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, "I do not know Him," I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.' Then the Jews said to Him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?' Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.' Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by." (Jn 8:51-59)

Did Jesus mean to say, before Abraham was born, God knew about Jesus' coming? This approach ignores the fact that Jesus is answering a series of questions. "Are you greater than Abraham?" His answer indicates such. "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" The statement of verse fifty-eight only makes sense when it is allowed to answer this question. And note that Jesus said, "Before Abraham was". If "I AM" refers only to the existence of Jesus in the mind of God, then so also must the reference to Abraham, for it does not speak of his birth. Additionally, Jesus attributed to Himself the present tense of the verb 'to be'. Why didn't Jesus say, "I was before Abraham"? Instead, He mixes verb tenses (the past with the present). A grammatical error? The Jews didn't think so. They recognized what Jesus was saying. The present tense 'I AM' is the name of God (Ex 3:13f). It is His name, because it describes His durable existence and consistency. In any point of time, God is. Only God is 'I AM'. The Jews knew this, and were ready to punish Jesus for this claim.

Silly arguments about Jesus hungering, thirsting, sweating and dying, totally ignore the fact that while Jesus was on earth, He was not only God, but also man. This state of being was not His natural state, but specially taken for our benefit (Phil 2:5-8). How do I explain that?... I do not! It is something only comprehensible to God! How does the Muslim explain the creation of the world? If it came from nothing, where did the something come from? It is beyond the realm of human understanding. How was Jesus God and man?... If I were God I would know that.

### ***Conclusion...***

Mankind can only know the mechanics of forgiveness as it is revealed by God. That does not guarantee we will understand all involved, but we can be sure our obligations will be clear.

We can try to poke holes in what His word clearly reveals; but how can our finite minds know the infinite. The Bible reveals the only just, and rational means of forgiveness, drawn out and explained to the furthest of our ability to understand. There are many good teachings in Islam, but as Muhammad himself revealed:

"And if thou (Muhammad) art in doubt concerning that which we reveal unto thee, then question those who read the Scripture (that was) before thee." (Sura 10:95)