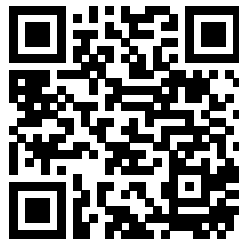


To My Muslim Friends

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Preface

It has been my privilege for many years to have friendly religious discussions with some of my Muslim colleagues, both in my native Egypt and in the United States. At no time did the discussions turn into heated arguments, but were always characterized by mutual respect. These discussions were mainly in the form of questions asked politely and discretely. The answers likewise were always in a polite manner. No one felt at any time that his feelings were hurt in spite of the fact that we spoke frankly concerning the difficulties each had concerning the other's beliefs.

This booklet is a result of these discussions through which I became aware of the stumbling blocks for the Muslim in regards to the Christian faith. I am indeed grateful to all my friends with whom I had such discussions, and hope this booklet will help every sincere seeker for the truth.

A. M. B.

August, 2004

Introduction

Christianity and Islam are two major world religions, each of which claims to be the truth as revealed by the one true and living God who created the heavens and the earth. Unfortunately the great majority of the adherents of either religion know very little, if any, about the beliefs of the other. Someone said that in Egypt, where Muslims and Christians live together in harmony, most of the time at least, all that Muslims know about Christians is that they forbid polygamy, but eat pig's meat, and all that Christians know about Muslims is that they forbid eating pig's meat but allow polygamy. For this reason, they can be close neighbors, friends, or coworkers, and yet never discuss religious matters.

As a Christian who grew up in Egypt and had many Muslim friends whose friendship I really cherished, I must state that during the 28 years I lived in Egypt, I have never been insulted or prejudiced against by any Muslim. That was fifty years ago, and I believe it is still so in Egypt. In the last few years, however, there have been many unhappy developments including a deteriorating relationship among a few of the followers of these two religions. This is specially so among some of the outspoken leaders and preachers of these two faiths. Mudslinging has resulted in hard feelings and mistrust.

While it is proper or even essential to have strong convictions, it is improper to speak in a derogatory way against other people's religion. It is acceptable for a Christian preacher to teach the tenets of the faith and to refute any teaching that contradicts the Bible, but it is not acceptable to use derogatory language on television for example. It is understandable that a Muslim Imam would exhort his listeners to hold firmly to the teachings of the Qur'an, but it is not right to describe Christians as infidels when his words are carried by a microphone and are heard by Christians. Such actions by either side will not gain the speaker new converts. It will only result in hatred and can lead the fanatic and the less stable into erratic behavior, including criminal acts.

The Bible gives us good examples of how to preach to people of other religions. We are not to attack them or insult them, but simply to present the Good News. When the Apostle Paul went to Ephesus and spent three years there, he preached the good news of salvation, but did not attack the pagan religion, nor did he speak against the false goddess Diana (Artemis of the Ephesians). The townclerk, who was in charge of order in the city, testified to that fact and was thus able to disperse the mobs that were opposing the preaching. This is recorded in the Bible in the book of Acts 19:37. Nor did Paul speak in public against the other false religions, neither in Asia Minor (present Turkey) nor in Europe. But he always presented the truth and prayed for the salvation of the people to whom he presented the good news of salvation. It is my wish to follow the same principle. To present what I believe and the reader examine what I say, and then decide for himself. God does not force anyone to embrace a religion against his will. This is just not God's way. Furthermore, I will do so with a spirit of love. This is why I called it "To My Muslim Friends," because friendship enables us to discuss matters in a friendly way and prevents us from hurting each other's feelings. I also wrote this because of my appreciation for the many Muslim friends whose moral character I admire, and who have been faithful in their friendship. With some of them I have enjoyed friendly

discussions of important religious issues.

The purpose of this booklet is to discuss the main biblical doctrines which are often misunderstood by the sincere Muslim, or that seem to him to be blasphemy.

"Love never fails"

(1 Corinthians 13:8)

The Holy Bible - An overview

The Bible consists of two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament was written by men of God before Christ came to this earth. It begins with the five **Books of Moses**, written by Moses the prophet. The first of these five books is the book of Genesis, a name that means the origins or beginnings. It opens with the statement that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. It gives the beginning of mankind, the entrance of sin into the world, the spread of sin requiring the Flood in the days of Noah, the beginning of nations and languages, and the call of Abraham. It ends with the death of Joseph and the people of Israel living in Egypt.

The next book is Exodus, which begins with what happened after the death of Joseph, the enslavement of the Israelites and their leaving Egypt under the leadership of Moses. The five Books of Moses end with the death of Moses after leading the Israelites to the border of the land of Canaan.

These five books, commonly known as The Torah, are followed by the **twelve Historical Books** that begin with the book of Joshua who led the people into Canaan, and end with their captivity by the Babylonians, their expulsion from the land, and then the return of a small number who rebuilt the Temple and the wall of the city. It is obvious to any reader of the Bible that the history is given in an orderly way so that the reader can easily learn about the life of Abraham or Joseph or Moses or David.

The historical books are followed by five poetic books, known as the **Books of Wisdom**. They include the book of Job (Arabic: Ayoub), the Psalms (Al Zabour) which consists of 150 poems or spiritual songs, and the three books by Solomon, the largest of which is the book of Proverbs.

These books are followed by the **Books of the Prophets**, sixteen in number, written between the years 800 and 400 B.C. They contain hundreds of prophecies, many of which are about Christ, His birth from the Virgin, His birth in Bethlehem, His life, His death and His resurrection, as we will see later. They also speak of His future coming as King of kings.

The New Testament

The New Testament was written after Christ ascended to heaven, and begins with the four Gospels. A question frequently asked is, "Why are there four Gospels, and which one is more reliable?"

The four Gospels were written by divine inspiration, but each presents a certain aspect about Christ. The Gospel of **Matthew** presents Him as the promised Messiah, who was promised to Abraham and through whom all nations will be blessed. God also promised David that the Messiah King would come from his offspring. Therefore Christ's genealogy in the first chapter goes to Abraham and

David. The Gospel of Matthew also presents Him as the one whom the nation rejected in spite of all evidence to the truth of His claims. Furthermore, it presents Him as the One who will come again in power and glory, and will be acknowledged as the true King appointed by God. It has many quotations from the Old Testament to prove these facts to the Jewish nation that has rejected Him.

The Gospel of **Mark** presents Him as the Servant who came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for us. Therefore, there was no need for a genealogy. The characteristic expression in this Gospel is "immediately" or "at once" Jesus did this or that, showing how He labored continuously for the blessing of man.

The Gospel of **Luke** presents Jesus as the Man who came for the whole human race, and not just for one nation. Therefore His genealogy, in the third chapter, extends to Adam, the head of the whole human race. His parables show the grace of God offered to the worst sinner who repents and believes.

The Gospel of **John** presents Him as the One who existed from all eternity, and by whom all things were made. In other words the four Gospels present Him as King, Servant, Human, Divine.

Contrary to the common idea among many, there was no "Gospel" that came down upon Jesus. The Holy Spirit inspired the four writers mentioned above to write the four Gospels. The expression "the gospel of Christ" means God's good news to man through Christ.

After the four Gospels we have the book of **The Acts of the Apostles** which tells us how Christianity spread into much of the world through the disciples of Christ to whom He gave commandment to go to the whole world and preach the love of God and the good news of salvation. They did so without using threat or force, sword or spear, instead sacrificing for the sake of others. They were persecuted, but continued to call on people to turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God.

The book of the Acts of the Apostles is followed by twenty one letters commonly known as **The Epistles**, containing important doctrinal facts as well as instructions about the practical life that is pleasing to God.

Finally, there is the book of **The Revelation**, which tells us about future events. The Bible began with the creation of the heavens and the earth, and ends with the future new heavens and new earth. The whole Bible is given by inspiration of God.

*"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."
(2 Timothy 3:16)*

Was the Bible Changed?

It is very important for every Muslim to know whether the Bible was changed. The Qur'an states very clearly and dogmatically that the Bible came from God and its precepts are to be accepted by every believer. One of the essential elements of the faith in Islam is to believe in the Books given by God before the Qur'an. So if the Bible has not been changed, it has to be believed by the Muslim. Here are some of the references in the Koran, in some "Suras," that attest to the divine origin of the Bible:

The Table (Al Maida. 5): 43-48, 68

The Women (Al Nisaa. 4): 136

The Cattle (Al An'am. 6): 89,90

The Narration (Al Qasas. 28): 49

The Bees (Al Nahl. 16): 43 (In Tafseer Al Jalalin, they state clearly that "ask the people of the Book" (in N.J. Dawood's translation of this verse) refers to those who know the Torah and the Injil, i.e., the Bible)

From the above we can see how important it is for the Muslim to know whether the Bible has been changed after the Qur'an appeared. Obviously it could not have been changed before the Qur'an appeared, for God would not have recommended a book that had been corrupted.

Proofs that the Bible has not been changed

First of all, more than 75% of the Bible is the Old Testament. The Old Testament is the Holy Bible for the Jews, and it is exactly as the Old Testament in the Christian's Bible. It is unthinkable that the Jews and the Christians agreed on changing it in exactly the same way, while the Jews reject tire Christian beliefs. Also about 200 years before Christ came to this earth, the Old Testament was translated from the original Hebrew and Aramaic languages into Greek, a translation known as the Septuagint, which has been in existence uninterruptedly from that time till today. It is a fact that there are many passages in the Old Testament which condemn the Jews for their unbelief and their disobedience to the laws of God. If they were to change anything they would have changed those passages.

Secondly, there are many ancient copies of the Bible that date back to hundreds of years before the appearance of the religion of Islam. There are more than 5000 handwritten copies (i.e. manuscripts) of the New Testament in the Greek language, and 10000 copies in Latin, which were written in the 2nd and 3rd centuries. In Egypt copies were found in Alexandria in the northwest, in Ikhmim in the deep south, and in Sinai in the northeast, and they all agreed in their contents. Many very ancient copies were discovered in 1947 in a cave in Wadi Qumran located northwest of the Dead Sea, and are known as the Dead Sea scrolls. All of them are similar to the Holy Bible we have in our hands today. These are undeniable facts and prove that the Bible has not been changed.

Thirdly, the New Testament was translated into many languages in the 2nd and 3rd centuries and many copies existed in many different countries. How could all these copies in these many languages in the different countries be collected and changed in the same way? It is unthinkable.

Finally, if Christians were to change their Bible would not they have changed the passages that have been difficult to interpret and have caused divisions? The Holy Bible has never been changed. This is an undeniable fact.

Those who accuse Christians of having changed the Bible should be able to answer these questions: When was it changed? Who changed it? What parts were changed, and why? What did it say in the original language? Obviously they cannot answer these questions because the Bible was *never changed*.

Inspiration vs. Translation

The Bible was given by inspiration of God. This is a fact attested to in the Qur'an, as we have seen. Besides, there are other proofs, including the many prophecies fulfilled literally, though they were written a long time in advance. Also the influence of the Bible on individuals, families and societies proves its divine origin. The whole Bible has been translated into hundreds of languages, and portions of it, e.g. different Gospels or the New Testament, have been translated into about 2000 languages. Translators took extreme care in their work. In some cases, e.g. the English language, there are many different translations. This led some to think that there is more than one Bible and that we are not sure which one is reliable. The fact is, there is only *one Bible*, though there may be more than one translation in the same language. This is also true of the Qur'an. I have seen four different English translations of the Qur'an, those by Pickthall, G. Sale, A. Yusuf Ali, and N.J. Dawood. I have the last two in my possession. There are differences in the wording between them, but there is only one Qur'an.

What about the Gospel of Barnabas?

It always surprises me when my Muslim friends ask about this book known in Arabic as "Injil Barnaba." It surprises me because in every case I find that the person who mentions it has never read or even seen a copy of this false gospel. There are many proofs that it is not a true Gospel. I will only mention a few. For anyone who wants to study the matter, I recommend the following scholarly books: *The Gospel of Barnabas*, by Dr. William Campbell published in English in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, and *Injil Barnaba in the Light of History, Sound Mind and Religion*, by Awad Samaan, published in Arabic in Cairo, Egypt. Briefly, this so-called gospel is false and should be rejected for many reasons including its many geo graphic, historical and scientific errors. It also contradicts both the Bible and the Qur'an.

Suffice to say here that the highly respected Muslim scholar, Dr. Abbas Mahmoud Al Akkad, former professor at the prestigious Al Azhar University in Cairo, advised Muslims to not get entangled in this false gospel because it *contradicts the Qur'an*. One of those contradictions is the claim that Jesus (Issa) stated that he was not the Christ (Al Masih), but that Mohammed who will come after him is Al Masih! Dr. Mohammed Shafik Ghorbal in the Arabic Encyclopedia, *Al Mawsooah Al Arabiah Al*

Moiassarah, stated under the title "Barnaba" that it is the name of a false (or forged) gospel written by a European in the 15th century, and that in its description of the political and religious environment in Al Quds (Jerusalem) in the days of Christ, there are huge mistakes. He also drew attention to the same error mentioned above, that this false gospel claims that Issa (Jesus) stated that He was not the Christ, but came to proclaim Mohammed who was to be the Christ.

It would not have been necessary to delve into this if it were not for the fact that many, without ever reading it or seeing it, claim that it is the true Gospel. Obviously it is a false one.

In summary, we have seen that the Qur'an declares clearly that the Bible came from God. We also gave proofs that the Bible we have today is the same Bible that was at the beginning of the 7th century when the Qur'an appeared in Arabia. The Bible was never changed.

Forever, O Lord, Thy Word is settled in Heaven."

(Psalm 119:89)

The Crucifixion - Introduction

For a person to know the truth, it is essential that he would have a sincere, heart-felt desire for it, and a determination to accept the truth, no matter how much it will cost him. Changing one's religious beliefs is not an easy matter for anyone with convictions. It is very painful, and yet at the end, Christ's words are very true, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). To know the truth, sometimes one may need to ask God to reveal it, while one is willing to sacrifice everything if necessary. God is always willing to reveal the truth to the sincere seeker, the one who perseveres in asking God for it.

We have seen that the Bible has not been changed, so now let's see what it says about the death of Christ.

Is Christ's Death a Fact?

There are several proofs that affirm the fact of the death of Christ:

The Old Testament

The Old Testament speaks of the death of Christ, and it is well known that the Old Testament is the Holy Book for the Jew. It contains several prophecies about the death of Christ. The Jews do not deny the existence of these prophecies, and many of their religious scholars admitted that they are about the promised Messiah (Al Masih), but they deny that the true Messiah ever came. They accuse Jesus (Issa) of being an imposter. When He came they did not believe Him, and this fact of rejecting Him was also foretold by their prophets, as we will see.

We now will look at some of the prophecies in the Old Testament about the death of Christ. The first is Isaiah 53. This chapter of 12 verses was written about 700 years before Christ came to this earth. It predicts that the nation of Israel would not believe Him, although God demonstrated His power through Him (v. 1). Also, that although He was the One with whom God was pleased in the midst of a barren world, or a dry ground, Israel saw in Him nothing appealing to them that they might desire Him (v. 2.) Not only did He not appeal to them, but they actually despised Him and rejected Him (v. 3). Israel rejects that His sufferings were on behalf of others. "Surely He has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for *our transgressions*, He was bruised (i.e. crushed) for *our iniquities*. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes (or scourging) we are healed" (w. 4-5.). We were all like lost sheep but He bore our punishment. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way, and the *Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all*" (v. 6). This needs no comments; it is the good news for man in a nutshell.

Furthermore, we learn from this chapter that Christ willingly went to the cross and was silent, not defending Himself during His trials (v. 7). And this is what we learn in the Gospels. It was prophesied more than 700 years before. While Israel had planned to give Him the burial of the wicked by either casting the corpse in a big ditch along with other criminals, or leaving His body to be devoured by the beasts, as was their habit concerning the victims of crucifixion, God decreed that He would be buried in the grave of a rich man (v. 9). This is exactly what happened as we learn from the record in the Gospels, where we learn that He was buried in the tomb of a noble and rich man, Joseph of Arimathea (Youcef of Al Ramah), as recorded in Matthew 27:57-60, Mark 15:43-46, Luke 23:50-53, and John 19:38-40. His life on this earth is described with these words, "He has done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth (v. 9). This refers to His sinlessness and perfection. His resurrection is predicted in the statements: "He shall see His seed (referring to spiritual seed, i.e. believers), He shall prolong His days...He shall see of The travail of His soul and be satisfied" (w. 10- 11). Other significant statements in this chapter that refer to His death on our behalf include, "He shall...justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities...He has poured out His soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors (He was crucified between two thieves), and He bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors (He prayed for them on the

cross)" (w. 11-13). This chapter alone gives a definite proof of the death of Christ on our behalf.

What do unbelieving Jews do with this passage? For about 1000 years after Christ, their commentators stated that this is about the Messiah who has not yet come. However when they found that many Jews who read this passage began to ask questions that they could not answer, they tried to find other interpretations. Presently, the Jews do not include this chapter in their religious readings, nor in fact in their commentaries. A Jewish colleague gave me a commentary on the Torah. It has many references to Isaiah, but not one to this chapter, because this chapter gives a definite proof that they rejected their promised Messiah and demanded His death.

Other Old Testament Prophecies

There are several other statements in the Old Testament that refer to the death of Christ. The prophet David, 1000 years before Christ, prophetically spoke of the piercing of His hands and feet (Psalm 22:16), which obviously did not happen to David but to Christ when He was nailed to the cross. He spoke likewise of giving Him vinegar when He thirsted (Psalm 69:21), which also happened at the cross (John 19:28-30). Moreover David spoke of dividing His clothes and casting lots upon His vesture (Psalm 22:18). All these details happened at the crucifixion, as recorded in the Gospels.

The prophet Zechariah, about 400 years before Christ came, referred to the piercing of His side with the spear (Zechariah 12:10), which the Roman soldier did to Christ to make sure that Christ actually died (John 19:32-34). Many details are given in the Old Testament in relation to the death of Christ on the cross and the events that surrounded it. All was fulfilled exactly as predicted, because the Author of the Bible is God, who knows the end from the beginning.

In the Old Testament there are many accounts about individuals and events which foreshadow or picture the death of Christ. These events actually happened, and yet when we study them, we cannot fail to see in them lessons that draw our attention to the fact of the death of Christ for our redemption. A good example of that is in the story of Abraham offering his son. It is recorded in Genesis 22. Abraham in obedience to God's commandment took his son to offer him as a sacrifice. On the way to the place where he was going to offer him, his son, not knowing that he was going to be the sacrifice, asked him, "Father, we have the wood and the fire, but where is the lamb?" Abraham said, "My son, God will provide Himself a lamb to be offered." Finally when he had put his son on the altar and was about to slay him, the angel of the Lord called to him out of heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham, lay not your hand upon the lad, nor do anything unto him." Abraham had proven his absolute obedience to God. Then Abraham looked and saw behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns, which he took and offered in the place of his son.

This actual story teaches us the need for a redeemer. The ram was only a symbol or a foreshadow of the true Redeemer. Certainly a ram was not an expensive sacrifice, not a "great slaughter" (zabh azeem). After all Abraham was very rich and to offer a ram instead of his son was a very small price. Besides, he did not pay for the ram.

God provided for Himself the sacrifice. The ram was a type or a foreshadow of the true Redeemer. The Bible states clearly that the blood of animals, whether sheep, goats or oxen, cannot remove from us the guilt of our sins (Hebrews 10:4). There were millions of sheep offered by the Jews through the centuries, but when Christ came, John the Baptist (known in Islam as Yahia Ibn Zakarya) pointed to Him and said: "Behold the *Lamb of God* who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). All the animal sacrifices were nothing more than foreshadows of the true Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

Another example is the lamb of the Passover. When God was about to bring the people out of Egypt, He gave the prophet Moses important instructions. He told him that each household should take a lamb, which has no blemishes, and slay it and put the blood on both sides of the door and its upper threshold. God was going to slay the firstborn son in Egypt, but promised to save those who had the blood on the outside. He said to Moses that when He sees the blood, He would not allow the destroying angel to kill their sons. While this actually happened, it also foreshadows the death of Christ who is the foundation of our salvation. The Old Testament has many such examples.

In summary then, the Old Testament announced the death of Christ, both by clear statements such as in Isaiah chapter 53 and by symbols and foreshadows.

The New Testament

The New Testament teaches us that Christ died on the cross and rose again on the third day. Christ told this to His disciples in advance. The following quotations from the Gospel of Matthew should suffice. The other Gospels also attest to the same fact. "From that time forth began Jesus to show unto His disciple that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day" (Matthew 16:21). "And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man [a title He often used about Himself] shall be betrayed into the hands of men, and they shall kill Him, and the third day He shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry" (Matthew 17:22-23). "Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles, to mock and to scourge, and to crucify Him, and the third day He shall rise again" (Matthew 20:18-19).

In addition, in this same chapter in verse 28, He tells them that this is why He came to this earth. He came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life a *ransom* for many. Many more verses could be quoted in which Christ told His disciples in advance that He would die and rise again on the third day. In fact He also told them when and how He would die. In Matthew 26:1- 2 we read, "And it came to pass, when Jesus had finished all these sayings, He said unto His disciples, ye know that *after two days* is the feast of the Passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be *crucified*." Interestingly, the prophet Daniel, six centuries before, was given a prophecy in which he was told that Christ would die at exactly that time! (Daniel 9:26).

Each of the four Gospels gives us in detail many of the events that took place when Christ was brought before the religious authorities, and after that before the civil

authorities, and was finally taken to the cross. No one who reads these accounts in Matthew 26 - 27; Mark 14 - 15; Luke 22 - 23; and John 18 - 19 would fail to see clearly and convincingly that it was Christ who was arrested and nailed to the cross, died and was buried. Mary the mother of Jesus was at the cross and saw her own Son, and knew that it was He whom they killed. John the disciple who was very close to Him was standing there. He was an eyewitness. The very words that Christ said on the cross could not have been said by anyone else. The first thing He said was "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Judas would not have said that. Nor could anyone else have said to the thief who repented and believed on Jesus, "Assuredly I say to you, today thou wilt be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Only Christ and no one else could say that. Then there were His final words on the cross, "Father into Your hands I commend My spirit" (Luke 23:46). It behooves every sincere seeker to read the account in each of the four Gospels. He will have no doubt about the fact of Christ's death on the cross. It is obvious that the disciples did not make up the story of His death. In fact, they were sad and devastated until they saw Him again after His resurrection.

After His resurrection, Christ appeared to His disciples several times for a period of forty days, giving them infallible proofs that He did rise from the dead. They had no doubts about His death, but He wanted to prove to them that He actually and physically rose from death. This fact is stated in each of the four Gospels. Also in Luke 24:44-48, He explained to them that His death and resurrection were a fulfillment of what was predicted in the Old Testament prophecies. And *that* was to be the essence of the message of salvation that must be preached to all nations. In John 20:19-20, we learn that on the same day of His resurrection, at evening, He appeared to His disciples and said to them, "Peace be unto you" and showed them His hands where they could see the place of the nails, and His side where He was pierced with the spear of the Roman soldier. Thus He proved to them that He is the One who was crucified and not someone else in His place.

In summary then, the proofs that Christ died on the cross include:

- Old Testament prophecies that spoke of His death.
- Christ told His disciples in advance that He would die and rise again.
- The four Gospels give detailed accounts of Christ's death.
- Christ appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, and told them why He died on the cross.

There should be no doubt therefore about this very important fact.

A Reply to an Objection

Many have raised an objection wondering why God did not save Him. Was Christ defeated by those evil people? This is not an unreasonable question. If Christ was defeated or forced to die, then we would be right in asking these questions. But we saw that Christ already told His disciples that He came to give His life a ransom for many, that is, He came to die on our behalf. Yes Christ could have saved Himself if He wanted. When Judas came with the soldiers to arrest Him, He told His disciples who wanted to defend Him that if He wanted, He could have asked the Father to send armies of angels to destroy these people, "But then how shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?" (Matthew 26:53- 54). In fact Jesus could have

overcome them with one word. In John 18:4-6, we learn that when the soldiers came with Judas to arrest Him in the garden at night, He asked them whom they wanted. When they said, Jesus of Nazareth, He said "I am He." When He said that to them, they all went backward and fell to the ground. He certainly could have saved Himself at that time.

The fact that Jesus did not save Himself from death also puzzled those who saw Him on the cross. They said if God was pleased with Him, He would have delivered Him from death. It is interesting that the prophet David mentioned this in the Psalms 1000 years before Christ came, "All they that see Me laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver Him: let Him deliver Him, seeing He delighted in Him" (Psalm 22:7-8). But Christ did not deliver Himself from death because there were very important reasons for His willingly dying on the cross.

Christ announced from heaven,

*"I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold I live forevermore."
(Revelation 1:18)*

Is the Death of Christ Important?

The death of Christ is not only a fact, as we have seen with many infallible proofs, but it is also a very important fact. It is the very essence of the Gospel. The word *gospel* means *good news*. The apostle Paul, writing to the believers in Corinth, Greece, said, "Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel [i.e. the good news] which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand, by which also ye are saved...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). "According to the Scriptures" means as is written in the Old Testament.

To understand the importance of the death of Christ and the absolute necessity for it, we need to know the following facts:

- We all have sinned.
- God is holy and will not ignore sin.
- God loves man and considers him of great value in His sight.
- In saving man, God must be just and merciful at the same time.

We all have sinned. The Holy Bible, which is the inspired Word of God, declares that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). There are many verses in the Bible that assert this fact. Our own conscience also shouts within us to tell us that we have sinned. The wise king Solomon, the son of the prophet David, said that there is no man who lives on earth and does not sin, even if he is considered a good person (see Ecclesiastes 7:20). But what is sin? Some people think that sin is only the very bad things like theft, murder, adultery and blasphemy. But sin can be in the form of a transgression, that is breaking a commandment, or simply missing the mark. In the Arabic language, which is a Semitic language like the Hebrew, if one misses the right answer to a question, we say that he "akhta'a". We use the same word for committing a sin such as stealing. In other words, whenever we do what is not suited to God's holiness and glory we actually sin. If we commit adultery we sin by transgressing a commandment, but if we entertain unclean thoughts and look at dirty pictures we sin by doing that which does not suit God's holiness. That is why Christ said that if a man looks upon a woman to lust after her, he has committed adultery in his heart (Matthew 5:28).

We must remember that God is present everywhere and that He sees every thing we do and hears everything we say. To tell a lie in His presence is like ignoring or disrespecting Him. The same applies to telling dirty jokes or laughing upon hearing them. The reason for my giving all these details is the fact that we generally have a very poor idea of what constitutes sin. We also do not realize the seriousness of sin; it is an insult to God. When the prophet David sinned, God did not say he is a prophet, so he had special privileges. He sent him another prophet to tell him that in sinning he despised God. This is how serious sin is.

Besides the sins we commit, there are sins of omission. If I see a needy person and it is in my power to help him but I do not, I have committed a sin. The Bible says he who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is a sin (James 4:17).

It is obvious from the above that we all have sinned, and that sin is a very serious

matter.

God is holy and will not ignore sin. It is impossible for any of us, even the most religious and the most pious, to realize how holy God is. Both the Old and New Testaments speak repeatedly of His holiness. His eyes are purer than to behold iniquity. The prophet Isaiah saw a glimpse of God's holiness in a vision. The expressions were used symbolically, and expressed His holiness as requiring angels to hide their faces as unable to look at that glory. He saw in the vision that the angels were continually proclaiming His holiness, saying that He is holy, holy, holy. As a result of seeing only a slight glimpse of God's glory, Isaiah cried in great fear because he realized that he, a sinner, has been exposed by the surpassing glory and holiness of God. To understand the penalty deserved for sinning we must see the ugliness of sin in contrast to God's greatness and holiness. If a pupil insults a classmate, he deserves a limited punishment, but if he insults a teacher, he deserves greater punishment. If he insults the headmaster the punishment will be greater still, but if he insults the Prime Minister, or worse yet the King, then much greater will his punishment be! Now pause for a moment and think of what we as sinners deserve. If the greater the person insulted, the greater is the punishment deserved, then how about insulting the One whose greatness and holiness are unlimited, infinite and eternal? The answer is obvious and terrifying.

God loves man and considers him of great value in His sight. This fact is generally not realized by most people. It is generally believed that God is merciful and compassionate, but that He actually loves human beings is generally unknown. And yet this is a fact that is emphasized in the Holy Bible. God places great value on the human soul. Christ said that a man should also value his soul more than all worldly possessions. These are His exact words, "For what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26).

The love of God to human beings is said in the Bible to be the reason for Christ's death, as we will see. When God created man, He proved that man is of value in His sight. First of all, when creating man God said, "Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness," and He gave man dominion over the other creatures (Genesis 1:26). He did not say these things about any other created beings. Secondly, He breathed in man the breath of life, and man became a living soul, a soul that abides for eternity. Thirdly, God blessed man and spoke with him after creating him, giving him many privileges. Fourthly, before creating him He created all that was needed for his comfort and enjoyment, and after creating him, He planted the beautiful Garden of Eden (see Genesis 1-2). As a matter of fact God always delighted in blessing people. Even after mankind became so sinful that God brought the Flood in the days of Noah, He blessed the human race again. And when He called Abraham, He promised to bless Him, and to bless all the tribes of the earth through the Messiah who was to come from Abraham's descendants.

Indeed when we think of how God loves mankind and values them, we are amazed. The prophet David also said that when he looked at God's creation, such as the heavens, the moon and the stars, which He made, he was amazed that God cares about man and honors him (Psalm 8). The holy God loves sinful man, but hates his sin. His love and mercy, however, cannot be at the expense of His holiness.

In saving man, God must be just and merciful at the same time. It is impossible for a human judge dealing with a great crime to be absolutely just and very merciful at the same time. If he forgives the criminal he may be merciful but not just. And if he pronounces the due punishment, he is just but not merciful. It is possible to be partly merciful and partly just, but God *must* execute full justice and show infinite mercy. This was accomplished in the *voluntary* death of Christ on our behalf. Christ bore the punishment for the sins of all who take Him as Savior, when He died on the cross.

It is because the above facts are generally unknown, that many find it hard to believe that Christ died for us. In fact the Bible says, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the *power of God*" (1 Corinthians 1:18).

This of course raises some questions that must be answered. First, Why did it have to be Christ? It is a well-known fact that you cannot redeem a valuable thing with something less valuable. For example you cannot redeem valuable jewels, worth thousands of dollars, by twenty dollars. Likewise the Redeemer of mankind must be One whose value in the sight of God is infinite, and thus can save everyone who receives Him by faith. God said of Christ that He is His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased. And the Bible teaches that in Christ all the fullness of the Godhead was pleased to dwell. So He could redeem all who believe in Him. This could not be said about any prophet or apostle.

Another requirement in redeeming fallen man, is that the Redeemer must be sinless, one who has never sinned by thought, word or action. This is true of Christ and of Him alone. All the prophets and apostles admitted that they have sinned. Moses admitted his sins and the sins of his people in Psalm 90:8, when he said to God, "You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your countenance." That was Moses the great prophet (Kalimullah), so what about you and me? God did not allow him to enter the land because of a mistake that may seem small to us. Instead of speaking to the rock to bring water, as God said to do, he smote the rock with the rod. It doesn't seem so serious, but God considered it dishonoring to Him because he did not do exactly what God said.

The great prophet Isaiah felt he was totally finished, ruined, when he saw a glimpse of God's holiness (Isaiah 6:1-5). David soaked his bed with tears when he thought about his sins (Psalm 6:6), and asked God to cleanse him and create in him a new heart (Psalm 51:10). The apostle John said that if we claim we have not sinned, we lie and deceive ourselves (1 John 1:8). The apostle Peter said to the Lord Jesus, Lord I am a sinful man (Luke 5:8). And the apostle Paul described himself as the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). Where can we find a sinless man? In Christ alone, of whom the Bible says that "He knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21) and that "He did no sin" (1 Peter 2:22), and "in Him is no sin" (1 John 3:5). Only of Christ could it be said that He did no sin, knew no sin and in Him is no sin. Therefore only Christ could be the Redeemer of mankind. No one else could.

Secondly, could we not save ourselves by our good deeds? Unfortunately many people in almost all religions believe that it is possible for their good works to save them from the punishment for their sins. They believe that in the day of Judgment, God will put their good works on one side of the balance and their evil works on the

other side, and this determines their fate. But does any one of us know the weight of every sin? How much does a lie weigh? And how about the many lies in a lifetime? Similarly, how much does immorality, dishonesty, greed and all the other sins we do weigh? It is really a frightening thought. Sin must be viewed in the light of God's holiness and not by our estimation.

Now let us think about our good works and how much they weigh. How much does it cost to buy a palace on earth, to live in it 50 or 60 or a hundred years? And how much does it cost to earn a place in heaven for endless ages? Friend, none of us has what it takes to earn a place in heaven. Heaven is God's home and even if a man never sinned, he can only hope not to be thrown in hell, but he has no claim on heaven.

Do you know that our good deeds are often spoiled by pride or desire for the praise of men? No wonder the Prophet Isaiah said that our righteous works are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6), referring to performing religious activities while we at the same time commit sins. I saw once a man praying in the lobby of a large apartment complex of several floors. While he was praying a lad walked in and was noisy. The praying man then uttered a torrent of dirty words cursing him. The child ran away and the man resumed his prayer. Can such prayer be accepted, no matter how much the man had cleansed his body? As far as good deeds and good behavior are concerned, they are what we should do, but they do not erase our sins. This is a very important truth: good deeds do not cancel bad deeds. If a man kills someone, he is a murderer no matter how many good deeds he did before. And if one sins even once, he is a sinner.

No wonder the Bible tells us that on the basis of the Law (Shari'a), no one could be justified in God's sight (Romans 3:20). The fact is that the Law of God only showed us that we are all sinners. To trust in our good works is disastrous. Jesus Christ once illustrated this with a story recorded in Luke 18:9-14. He said that two men went to pray. One was a very religious man from a very strict sect, while the other was one of the tax collectors who were known for wickedness and dishonesty. The religious man began to pray and thanked God because he was not like other people who are extortioners, unjust, and adulterers. He also thanked God that he was not a bad man like that tax collector, and that he fasted twice a week (that is 104 days a year), and gave ten percent of his income for religious purposes. The tax collector also prayed, but would not even lift his eyes towards heaven. He smote upon his chest and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). In other words one was religious and did good deeds, and thought that God would accept him on that basis. He considered himself better than others, and humanly speaking he was. The other one acknowledged his sinfulness and asked for God's mercy. Now let us listen to what Christ said about them. He declared that the man who acknowledged his sinfulness and unworthiness to even lift his eyes toward heaven, went to his home a forgiven man. On the other hand the prayer of the religious one, who thought he was better than others, was of no value.

Thirdly, How about a combination of good works and God's grace? In other words can one be saved partly by his own good works, and partly by God's grace? That at first may seem reasonable, and it is what most people think. "We do our part," they say, "and God will do His." But what does God say about that? He says that it is all by grace and not by works. Good works have their place, but they are the *fruits* of

salvation. They do not *earn* salvation for us. Here are some verses from the Bible, the inspired Word of God:

"For by *grace* you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

"In Him (Christ) we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His *grace*" (Ephesians 1:8).

"Being justified freely by His *grace*, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24).

In these verses we see that we are saved by His *grace* or undeserved favor. We also learn that this grace is offered on the basis of Christ's redemptive work on the cross. Grace is God's offer to man, and faith is man's acceptance of God's offer. In Romans 11:6 we also learn that if it is by grace, it cannot be by works. This is God's clear teaching in His inspired Word. Many however raise a question. If salvation is by grace through faith, then can one believe and then do whatever he wants and still be saved? The answer is that the true believer wants to do only what pleases God. True faith, which means receiving Christ in the heart, is accompanied by a new spiritual birth. The person becomes a new person who loves righteousness and hates evil. Faith that produces no change in the person's life is not real faith; it is simply agreeing with a creed.

Fourthly, Is it fair that God punished Jesus for our sins? We must realize that Christ offered Himself willingly for our salvation. He was not forced into it. He told His disciples that He came "to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). He also said, "I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd gives his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Speaking of His death and resurrection, He also said, "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment I have received of My Father" (John 10:17-18). Thus we see that He died willingly, and His will was the same as the will of the Father. All that should emphasize to us His love that is above human understanding, and should lead us to love Him and to thank Him.

In summary then, we see that the death of Christ is a definite undeniable historical fact, and that it was necessary for our salvation. We also saw that no one else could have been our Savior, and that Christ died willingly. Furthermore, we saw that we cannot save ourselves. God declared clearly that there is no salvation in any other than Jesus Christ, "for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

*"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
(Romans 5:8)*

The Trinity - Is It Polytheism?

Before discussing this very important subject, it is essential that we realize the cardinal fact that the Bible teaches us that there is only *one* God. Both the Old and the New Testaments teach us this essential fact. Here are a few quotations:

"Know therefore this day, and consider it in your heart, that the LORD He is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath; there is none else" (Deuteronomy 4:39).

"Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one LORD: and thou shall love the LORD thy God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5).

"Thus says the LORD...I am the first and I am the last, and beside me there is no God" (Isaiah 44:6).

"I am the LORD, and there is none else; there is no God beside Me" (Isaiah 45:5).

"...There is no God else beside Me, a just God and a Savior, there is none beside Me. Look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:21-22).

"Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us?" (Malachi 2:10).

"It is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve" (Matthew 4:10).

"There is one God, and there is none other but He" (Mark 12:32).

"How can you believe, who receive honor from one another, and do not seek the honor that comes from the only God" (John 5:44).

"Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one" (Galatians 3:20)

"For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

"You believe that there is one God. You do well" (James 2:19).

Many more verses could be quoted to prove this cardinal fact that the Bible teaches us very clearly and very emphatically that there is only *one* God.

It is obvious then that the biblical Christian teaching is not that of polytheism.

The Meaning of the Trinity

What then is meant by the Trinity? The word "Trinity" is not in the Bible. Some have used the word Tri-unity, and this too is not in the Bible. It is a sincere attempt to use human language to describe a majestic theological truth related to the nature and essence of God. It must be obvious to any reasonable person that certain facts about God are above human comprehension.

Having seen that the Bible teaches us that there is only one God, it must be made clear that His oneness differs from man's oneness. Man is limited by his oneness. This is true of all created beings. One cannot be in Cairo, Egypt and in Rabat, Morocco at the same time. But can we say the same thing about the one true and living God, the Creator? Of course we cannot. God can be on His throne in heaven, and on this earth, if He wished, at the very same time. We do not mean that part of Him would be in heaven and part on earth, because God is not divided. He can be with all His glory and majesty on His throne in heaven, and at the same time on this earth, because He is God. This we cannot analyze with the rules of physics and mathematics, because God is above all these rules. He put His creation under the rules of mathematics, physics, chemistry, etc, but He Himself is above these rules. We can say that $1+1+1=3$ about created beings, about matter, but God is Spirit. He is not subject to these rules. If one feels frustrated about this, he is really frustrated about himself not being God! So again we say that God can be in heaven and on this earth at the same time and He is still one God not two. And that is what happened when Christ came to this earth as a man. The only way we can know facts about God is through what He was pleased to reveal to us in the Holy Scriptures. In the Holy Scriptures God tells us clearly concerning Christ that without controversy "great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16). This is what is commonly called the incarnation, another non-biblical word, but which defines a biblical fact.

The Incarnation

This refers to God coming to this earth in a human body. This at first may seem, to some at least, as a strange thing, a thing hard to believe. And yet it teaches us that God loves man very much, a love that is beyond human comprehension. We, being of a sinful nature, cannot imagine such love. But God's love is divine. It also teaches us that man is of a great value in the sight of God. We spoke about that before, but it is good to remember that when God created man, He had a close relationship with him. He visited him and spoke with him in the Garden of Eden. This communion was broken because of sin, but God wanted to restore it. Otherwise, it would seem as though Satan won the battle, and that cannot be. The incarnation was also a "must" for the work of redemption.

Perhaps in speaking about the incarnation it would help to illustrate it from history. Many of us have heard about great kings who went to the homes of poor people disguised in simple clothes with no royal pomp, to speak with them and know their needs without frightening them. I read once that the Caliph Omar Ibn Al Khattab did that, when he was the second Caliph. We certainly admire such men and their noble acts. The greater the person who takes a humble position, the more we admire him. But who is the noblest and greatest of all? Is it not God who created us all? If He

wanted to come to this earth as a man, can any of us tell Him not to do so? It was the wonderful way in which we could know God.

I once read a story about a child who was watching a long line of ants crossing a street, and he was fascinated with them. Then he saw a car from a distance coming down that street, and began to yell at the ants, telling them to get out of the way, so the car would not kill them. An older man heard him and asked him what he was doing. When the child told him, the older man said to him, "Son, if you want the ants to understand you, you have to become one of them." God came here as a man because without the incarnation, we would not be able to know God as we would wish to know Him. That is why Christ said, "He that has seen Me, has seen the Father" (John 14: 9). In John 1:18 we are told that no man has seen God at any time, but God's only Son, Jesus Christ, is the One who revealed Him. That brings us to an important question:

What do we mean by saying that Jesus is the Son of God? No one in his right mind will think that God had a wife or a mistress. Such thought is repulsive to everyone who worships the true and living God who created the heavens and the earth. Pagans in ancient times worshipped depraved gods of their own making and had such thoughts. But the Christian knows that God is Spirit and the mere mention of such a thought is disgusting to him. Before explaining what Christ's sonship means, it must be stated that it did not originate from Christians. It was God Himself who declared this fact.

When God sent the angel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary, he spoke with her, "And the angel said to her, 'Hail, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women', and when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. And the Angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the *Son of the Highest* " (Luke 1: 28-32).

When Mary was surprised and said, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?" he answered her and said, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore also, the Holy One who is to be born will be called the *Son Of God*." (Luke 1:35).

Thus the fact of His being the Son of God was announced by God Himself, through the angel Gabriel, to the Virgin Mary before she became pregnant.

This fact was also announced audibly by God at the very beginning of Christ's public ministry. Before Jesus began His ministry, He went to see John the Baptist at the Jordan River, to be baptized by him, thus declaring the beginning of His service to God and Man. When Jesus came out of the water, "suddenly a voice came from heaven saying, "This is *My beloved Son*, in whom I am well pleased." (See Matthew 3:13-17; it is also mentioned in the other Gospels).

Again, near the end of Christ's ministry and before He went to the cross, God declared the same fact. In Matthew 17:1-5, we learn that Jesus took three of His disciples to a high mountain, and there His face shone like the sun, and His clothes

became white as the light, and there appeared with Him two prophets, Moses and Elijah (Elias). Then a bright cloud overshadowed them, and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is *My beloved Son*, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him." This is recorded also in the Gospels of Mark and Luke. If God Himself called Jesus His beloved Son, can any of us object? Can any say to God that He should not say that?

Many more verses could be quoted to show that the Bible states clearly that Christ is the Son of God. But the above were selected to show that it was God Himself who called Jesus His Son.

What does Christ's sonship mean? We saw that it does not mean that God, blessed be His Name, had a wife or a mistress. Such thought indeed is blasphemous and repulsive. It means that Christ is of the same nature as God. The son of a human being is likewise a human being. And the son of a beast is a beast. Christ's sonship is a spiritual one and not a physical one; it did not result from a sexual relationship. Beyond that, we must bow in adoration, believing what God tells us about Himself, realizing that the human mind is limited. The human mind is finite, and the finite cannot comprehend or analyze the infinite. Before regeneration, through faith in Christ, the human mind is in utter darkness spiritually. When one receives Christ as Lord and Savior, confusion disappears and the soul becomes enlightened.

The following verses from the Bible help us to understand the oneness of the Godhead.

Speaking of the believers, Jesus said,

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father who gave them to Me is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. *I and My Father are One*" (John 10:27-30).

Speaking to His disciples, He told them twice in John 14:8-11, "*I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.*"

The Holy Spirit is also God and is one with the Father and the Son. When a man by the name of Ananias lied, the apostle Peter said to him, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit...you have not lied to men but to God" (Acts 5:1-4).

Before Christ ascended to heaven, He commanded His disciples to go to all nations proclaiming the message of salvation and teaching people what He had taught them. He also said, "baptizing them in the *name* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28: 18-20). Notice that He did not say "in the names" but "in the name," for it is one name, the name of the one and only true and living God. A mystery, yes, but also a divine fact clearly taught in the inspired Word of God.

There is a very significant and precious truth connected with this fact. We see the love of the Father who sent His Son, who is one with Him, to save us from damnation. The Bible says that God sent His only Son (literally His one and only, i.e.

the unique One) to this world to die on our behalf "so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). We also see the love of Christ who willingly died on our behalf that we may be forgiven and have everlasting life, if we believe on Him and receive Him by faith in our hearts. It is the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, who convinces us of our sins and leads us to repentance and faith in Christ. Thus we see the work of God for our blessing.

The doctrine of the Trinity also solves another problem. It answers the question that puzzles many. Before God created anyone or anything, was not He a God of love? Whom did He love then? Whom did He commune with? The answer to these questions is in the unique nature of the oneness of God as described before. The following verses illustrate that.

Shortly before Christ went to the cross to die on our behalf, He lifted up His eyes to heaven and said, "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Thyself, with the glory which I had with You *before the world was...* For You loved Me *before the foundation of the world...*" (John 17: 5, 24).

From what has been said in this chapter, it is obvious that Christ is not a mere man. It is not enough to believe that He was a prophet or an apostle or a great teacher or a marvelous miracle worker. He is God manifest in the flesh. This is the stumbling block for the unbelievers. It was the stumbling block for the Jews who demanded His death. They sought to kill Him "because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God" (John 5:18). They demanded from Pontius Pilate, the Roman ruler, to crucify Him, saying, "We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God" (John 19:7). Yet Christ said clearly, "If you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins" (John 8:24). So the choice is very obvious: one can either take sides with the unbelieving Jews who died in their sins because they refused to believe in Christ's deity, or to believe the clear teaching of the Word of God.

The proofs of the deity of Christ are many and would require a whole book to present them in detail. Briefly however they include the following. The Old Testament clearly states "...His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace" (Isaiah 9:6). In the New Testament He is called "Lord of all" (Acts 10:36) and "Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8), and "He is over all, God blessed forever" (Romans 9:5).

His miracles testify to His deity. Christ claimed His own deity and His miracles testified to the truth of His claims. He healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, opened the eyes of the blind, and raised the dead. He fed five thousand men in addition to the women and children, from five loaves and two fishes. This was an act of creation. In fact the Qur'an claims that He created a bird and gave it life. To be a creator of life is to be divine. Christ also demonstrated His power over nature. He ordered the raging winds and waves of the sea to become calm, and they immediately obeyed Him. He walked on the water of the sea and did many other miracles. Not only did Christ perform all these miracles, but He gave power to His disciples "over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease" (Matthew 10:1). They did miracles in His name, but Jesus did the miracles through the power of His own name. Even after He ascended to heaven, His disciples performed the miracles of healing in the power of the name of

Jesus. Peter could say to the man who was lame since birth, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk," and the man immediately stood up and walked (Acts 3:10). Indeed what a glorious Name.

The Bible declares emphatically that we can only be saved through Christ, "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Furthermore "to Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins" (Acts 10:43). This was not, nor could have been said, about a mere man, whether he was a prophet or an apostle. Neither Abraham nor Moses nor any other prophet could have said to the people that if they receive him in their hearts, they would be forgiven and have eternal life. When the thief on the cross next to Jesus repented and asked Him to remember him, Christ promised him that He would be with Him in paradise that same day. No mere human being could give such promise to a dying thief. See Luke 23:39-43.

When the worst sinner receives Christ, his life changes and he becomes a new person. This is a proof that Christ is not a mere prophet or apostle. In fact the apostles themselves acknowledged that they were the apostles and servants of Christ. One does not become a Christian by being born from Christian parents or by reciting a creed or by joining a church, but by receiving Christ by faith in one's heart. As a result, a divine work takes place in that person and he is saved and can be sure that he will go to heaven when his life on this earth ends.

The greatest declaration and the most happy news for our fallen and sinful human race is this:

*"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."
(John 3:16, NIV).*

Before concluding this study I want to emphasize one very important point. It was mentioned before that we can be saved only by God's grace, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us so that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but receives forgiveness of sins and eternal life. The Bible states that the Law (Shari'a) was given through Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (John 1:17). The Law of Moses demands punishment. It showed us that we all are sinners, and deserve to perish. But true faith in Jesus Christ makes us new people. The Bible teaches us that those who believe on Christ, that is receive Him in their hearts, are children of God through a new and spiritual birth. See John 1:12-13. But this grace that saves us also teaches us how to live a godly life.

What about a man who was a thief? Grace teaches him to not steal anymore, "but rather let him labor working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need" (Ephesians 4:28). What a change! Cutting off his hands would not change his heart. But faith in Christ does. This is true of all other kinds of sins. The true believer is taught that he belongs totally to the Lord: spirit, soul and body.

Some of the believers in Corinth, Greece, were before their salvation very evil people. The apostle Paul wrote to them saying, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Christ was criticized by the religious leaders for accepting sinners, eating with them and teaching them. He then gave them the parable of the prodigal son who left home, squandered his money and became very poor. But finally he "came to himself" and admitted his waywardness and decided to return to his father, admitting his error and asking to be accepted as a hired servant. He admitted that he did not deserve to be accepted as a son, for he had sinned against his father and against heaven. But when his father saw him from a distance, he had compassion on him, ran towards him and embraced him and kissed him. Christ wanted us to know the heart of the heavenly Father who yearns for our return to Him. Not only did the father receive him, but he also changed his condition. He gave him the best clothes and made a feast for him, saying that his son was lost and is now found, was dead but now lives. He told his audience that heaven and the angels rejoice when one sinner repents. Please read Luke chapter 15. His grace saves us and changes us and prepares us for the time when we will be with Him forever.

"For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts (i.e. having nothing to do with them), we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (Titus 2:11-14).

Conclusion

This book has been written to explain those biblical facts that have been difficult for the sincere seeker who would rather have the truth than anything else this world can offer. It is not my purpose to attack anyone's beliefs, neither to prove superiority of one group of people over another. We are all sinners, and we all have broken God's commandments. Therefore we all need God's salvation by His grace through faith in Him and His Word. In the Bible, God has clearly shown us the way to salvation. He showed us how we can be sure that we will never go to hell, and to know with certainty that we will go to heaven. For this reason, the first issue discussed was to prove that the Holy Bible was never changed, and that it is the inspired Word of God. This had to be proven or the rest of the discussion would be of no value since it is all based on what the Bible says.

God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). And this is our desire too. The booklet was written with a motive of friendship and love, and not with any desire to be argumentative or offensive. To change one's religious beliefs is a serious matter and often very painful, because we grow up from early childhood with those beliefs and they become more and more rooted in us as time goes by. Changing them has been likened to "the sundering of limb from limb, or rending the flesh from our bones," a very painful procedure indeed. Yet at the end, it is always best to "buy the truth and sell it not" (Proverbs 23:23).

Christ said, "If you continue in My word, then you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, *and the truth shall make you free.*" (John 8:32).