

الإنسان، الخطية، والغفران

Humanity, Sin & Salvation In Islam and Christianity

Beginning with this issue we will be featuring several articles under the above title, written from the perspective of one who knows Muslim sources and interpretations from the inside. The Qur'anic quotations are taken from the Windows CD-ROM, Holy Quran, Pajookesh Corporation, and the Hadith quotations from the Islamic Computing Centre CD-ROM, Islamica. Reference numbering sometimes changes from one version to another. The author has not reproduced texts in Arabic script except in cases where there is some emphasis in Arabic which may not be as evident in English. It may also seem to the non-Arab reader that there is unnecessary repetition in the quotations. Bear in mind that this is a common mode of stressing authenticity and importance in Arab communication.

Editor

General Introduction

In the past 20 years I have seen numerous sin & salvation diagrams on how to present to others what Jesus did. First was the Four Spiritual Laws tract translated into Arabic. Then came the Navigators Bridge Illustration, then Evangelism Explosion, etc. While most of these address a Christian Audience, they have been helpful even with Muslims. But is there anything available that specifically meets the needs of Muslims and asks the questions they ask? Muslims do not believe in original sin, or do they? A Muslim has no need for a Saviour, only good guidance and direction. He needs no transformation, only reformation. Why should an innocent person pay the price for the guilty one? Is there anything in the Qur'an, Hadith or Muslim cultures that helps us with these questions? Indeed there is. In a series of articles I will seek to explain both the formal Islamic view and the informal one. I will mix between the scholastic interpretation and the common understanding. In my experience the street analysis, the Qur'an and the Hadith all diverge from the formal or the official view. The first article will be of a technical nature but the rest will address the meaty issues. So don't give up before the end. I will use also folk stories & jokes which can help present the issue of sin and salvation to Muslims in easier and more culturally-sensitive ways.

The first article will deal with the purpose and nature of humanity in the Qur'an and the Hadith. I will not explain the Christian view unless necessary for understanding of the subject. I assume the reader has a good understanding of the Christian view. It is important to see and hear what Muslims themselves are

saying, not just what Christians are saying about Muslims. I will not interpret the Islamic materials to make them fit Christian doctrines. But I will challenge Muslims to examine those of their own materials and documents which are very similar to, if not the same as, what is written in the Bible. My goal is not debate, but to show that the official Islamic view does not jibe with Qur'an or Hadith.

Article One: The Islamic view of Humanity

Overview

All people are born as true Muslims, innocent, pure, and free as shown in Sura 30:30. There is no single act which has warped the human will. Any concept of original sin is very much contrary to the teachings of Islam. It is not sin for man to be imperfect and fallible. As a finite creature he is bound to be so. However, sin is committed when a man has the ways and means of perfection and decides not to avail himself of them. Man is not responsible for committing sin in childhood. He only becomes responsible after he grows up, is able to exercise his God-given intellect, and can thus distinguish between right and wrong. This is the only time when he can bear responsibility for his actions before his Creator. Having been born good, what he becomes after birth is largely the result of external influence and environment.

Since man is a good and responsible being, committing sinful acts is the responsibility of the actual offender only. According to orthodox Muslim interpretation, sin is not hereditary. Neither is it communal in nature, nor

is it transferable. God has given man freedom of will, and man is therefore personally responsible for his own actions, good or bad, right or wrong. A man can misuse his freedom and fall into corruption and all other vices, but at the same time he is capable of reform and receiving forgiveness if he sincerely chooses to submit to God's guidance. Sin is acquirable, but not innate. Therefore, if man rightly uses those special qualities with which he has been endowed, he can easily avoid sin. Sin is not inevitable, because man is not sinful

Fitrah

To understand the Islamic view of humanity we have to define the term and the doctrine of *Fitrah* (الفطرة) in Islam. Fitrah is defined as an inborn natural predisposition which exists at birth in all human beings and which can not change. It is inclined towards right action and submission to Allah. It can be described as the concept of original goodness, in contrast to the Christian concept of original sin. Fitrah is defined in both linguistic and religious terms.

Linguistically the word comes from the Arabic radicals, ف-ط-ر the verbal