

PAUL AND THE GOSPEL

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Every knowledgeable Christian concedes that the real founder of Christianity is St. Paul and not Jesus Christ (peace be upon him). In any event, if there is any division between a Muslim and a Christian on the grounds of dogma, belief, ethics or morality, then the cause of such conflict could be traced to an utterance of Paul found in his books ... in the Bible. (Ahmed Deedat, *Crucifixion or Cruci-Fiction?*, ch. 1, pp. 1-2)

This view expressed by Ahmed Deedat is common in the Muslim community. Muslims are taught that modern Christianity is not based on Jesus but on the teachings of Paul. Is this true? Is Christianity based on Paul and not Jesus? In this article I will examine the place of Paul in Christianity.

Paul and the Bible

The first point to understand is that the writings of Paul are approximately 7% of the Bible - 7%. The Bible contains the books of the Torah, Prophets, Psalms and Gospel.

The Bible			
<----- c. 1500 years ----->			
Torah	Prophets	Psalms	Gospel

Christians believe all of the prophets and make no distinction between them, therefore, they read all of the prophets. Christians do not just read Paul but all of the prophets, and what they believe about God comes from all of the prophets not just Paul.

At this point Islam is very different to Christianity because the Qur'an only contains what Muhammad recited and no one else. Islam *is* based on one man, Muhammad, but Christianity is based on all of the prophets.

Paul and the Prophets#1

The apostle Paul commands Christians to read all the prophets. Paul wrote:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16, NIV)

Therefore, Paul does not turn people away from the earlier prophets to follow him, instead he commands Christians to read all the prophets, and this is what Christians have always done. Again, Christianity and Islam are very different at this point.

Paul and the Prophets#2

What the apostle Paul taught agrees with earlier prophets.

	Torah	Prophets	Psalms	Jesus	Paul
One God	Gen. 1:1	Is. 45:5	Ps. 96:5	Mark 12:29	1 Tim. 2:5
God created humanity in his image.	Gen. 1:26-27	Dan. 7:13-14, 10:4-6, Ez. 1:25-28, 43:1-3	Ps. 8, 82	John 10:29-39, 14:8-9	1 Cor. 11:7, Col. 1:15-20
The Fatherhood & Son of God	Ex. 4:22-23, Deut. 4:1, 32:6	2 Sam. 7, 1 Chron. 17:13, Is. 45:11, 63:16, 64:8, Jer. 31:9, Hos. 11:1, Mal. 2:10	Ps. 2, 80:15, 82:6	Mat. 6:9, 26:63-64	Rom. 1:1-7
God dwells and fellowships with his people.	Gen. 3:8, 4:14, Ex. 25:9, 29:45-46	Ez. 10, 48:35, Zec. 2:10-13, 8:3	Ps. 46, 76:2	John 1:14, 2:20-21	Eph. 2:22
God accepts a sacrifice for sin.	Lev. 16, 17:11	2 Chron. 29:20-24, Job 1:5, 42:7ff, Is. 53, Ez. 16:63	Ps. 51:19	Mat. 26:27-28	Rom. 3:25

As you can see the prophets build on each other and they are meant to be read together. Paul taught part of this message of the prophets.

If Christians and Muslims believe different things it is because Christians read all of the prophets while Muslims just follow Muhammad.

Did Paul change the message of Jesus?

It is also common for Muslim leaders to say that Jesus simply came to the nation of Israel to reaffirm the Law of Moses (Torah) and that it was Paul who changed this

teaching of Jesus. For example Bilal Philips wrote:

Jesus stressed to his followers that his mission did not cancel the laws received by Prophet Moses. As the prophets who came after Moses maintained the law, so did Jesus. ... However, Paul, who claimed to be a disciple of Jesus, systematically cancelled the laws. (Bilal Philips, *The True Message of Jesus*, Rabwah: IPC, 2007, pp. 73-74)

However when Muslim leaders say this they are denying the Qur'an. The Qur'an says that Jesus brought a new revelation called the Gospel (5:46), and that this Gospel, while confirming the Torah, is different from the Torah.

And [I (Jesus) have come] confirming what was before me of the Torah and to make lawful for you some of what was forbidden to you. (Qur'an 3:50, Saheeh In.)

This change that the Gospel brings is because Jesus *fulfills* the Torah and Prophets. Jesus said:

Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law (Torah) or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. (Matthew 5:17, NIV)

Jesus fulfills the Torah and the Prophets. This is why the Gospel brings a change and it is Jesus who brought this change not Paul.

Jesus and His Apostles

Jesus had many disciples and from these he chose apostles. These apostles were his authorized witnesses and spokesmen. At first there were twelve apostles but over time Jesus appointed more (Rom. 16:7, 1 Cor. 15:6-9).

At first Paul was hostile to Jesus but God opened Paul's heart and Jesus called him to be his apostle.

For I (Paul) am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. (1 Corinthians 9:1, NIV)

Paul did not take this honour upon himself. It was Jesus who came to Paul (Acts 9, 1 Cor. 9:1) and appointed him to be an apostle.

The work of an apostle is very hard. Like many apostles and prophets before him the apostle Paul is misrepresented and quoted out of context. You should not believe those who do this.

A Beautiful Reading from Paul

Here is a beautiful reading from the Apostle Paul.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. (1 Corinthians 13:1-8, NIV)

It is the message of the Gospel that teaches us this kind of love.

A Prayer from Paul

Here is a beautiful prayer from the Apostle Paul.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day (return) of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ - to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9-11, NIV)

Pray this prayer for yourself.

Conclusion

Muslim leaders often misrepresent Christianity. Christianity is not based on Paul but upon all of the prophets, and Christians invite you to read all of the prophets too.