

# Substitution

Into The Light @ <http://islam.itl.org.uk>

I have a good number of Muslim friends. Often we invite each other to share in joyful occasions but we also share in each other's dilemmas and sorrows too. The occasion of the new year celebration was no different. Like me, a Muslim friend was feeling that most of the world was celebrating the Millennium without remembering the person after whom the calendar was established and the age counted. He was happy to see that there were Christians who still remembered Jesus and thanked and praised God for sending him into the world. However, he was feeling a little uncomfortable when, during a Christian prayer session, the following was read from the Bible:

"Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man (Adam) the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man (Jesus) the many will be made righteous." (Romans 5:18-19) [Words in parenthesis are mine].

"At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and

pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:3-7).

At home, after the meeting, my friend asked me questions as he usually does. He argued that such a message was not only against the Qur'an but was also against the Bible. He recited the following verse of the Qur'an: "No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another" (Surah 17:15). He also pointed out the following two passages from the Bible: "Everyone will die for his own sin" (Jeremiah 31:30). "The soul who sins is the one who will die." (Ezekiel 18:4,20).

This argument is not unique to my friend. Many Muslims reject what is said in these New Testament passages. They claim that by comparison from the two books, the Bible and the Qur'an, the belief that Jesus died for our sin is blasphemy. Many Muslims claim that Adam was forgiven for his fault and thus the matter was finished. Like my Muslim friend, others also accuse Paul of being a blasphemer by introducing such a

theology as found in the passage in Romans.

When we study the context of the above references from the Bible and the Qur'an, a very different picture emerges which does in fact comply with the message we find in Romans. The quotations from Ezekiel and Jeremiah deal solely with the individual guilt and responsibility of every person for his or her own wrong actions. The Qur'anic statement in its context refers to the day of Judgement. Muslims believe that one day the door of repentance will be closed and that on that day nobody will be able to help others, Christians too believe in the light of the Bible that when Jesus comes back, this option will cease.

Muslim friends should not be amazed at what Romans 5:18-19 says, because the Qur'an also propounds the same idea in Surah 2:35-36 when God cast Adam and Eve out of Paradise, with them went the whole human race. Commenting on this, Muhammad Pickthal points out that the command in the verse, "eat ye freely" is "in the dual as addressed to Adam and his wife", but the command "Fall down" is "In the plural form, as addressed to Adam's race." (His notes 6 and 7).

On the same passage Muhammad Asad's comment is that, "with this sentence, the address changes from the hitherto-observed dual form to plural form: a further indication that the moral of the story relates to the human race as a whole." (The Message of the Qur'an, p.10, footnote 30, [Gibraltar: Al-Andalus, 1980]).

None of us were born in Paradise or had the choice of remaining there. Instead we found ourselves in an utterly sinful environment. If Adam had not sinned he would have remained in Paradise and all his offspring would have been born there. Why then if he was wholly forgiven was he not allowed back in and why were we not also born in Paradise?

This brings us to what the Bible says that one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men ... For by one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (Romans 15:18,19). The Qur'an supports this view by showing that we all suffer the effects of the one man's sin on this earth with all of its decay and corruption and wickedness as a result of the judgement passed on that one man. A Muslim tradition is: Adam sinned and his race sinned (Mishkat: Bab Al-Iman Bil Qadr).

Muslims usually ask: What was the need of Christ's sacrifice and atonement? Could God not have given salvation without giving Christ's life? We know that God is both merciful and just. If Christ had promised salvation without giving his life, the demand of mercy may have been fulfilled, but in order to fulfil the demands of justice also, Christ paid the ransom (fidya) which was his precious blood. In this way God revealed his love for us. No wonder, one of the disciples of Christ said, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

God may have forgiven Adam, but suppose Adam had remained unrepentant. A paradise of self willed people is no paradise. New birth is necessary (John 3:3-5). God has taken the initiative. It is for us to respond (1

John 4:19).

The Christian Scriptures can tell you more about this subject. If you would like a copy in the English language, please contact us\*.

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