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Happiness is Submission to God Alone

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Dead Sea Scrolls *continued*

Eisenman and Wise have raised again the question of Jesus' originality, how original was Jesus, what did he bring that was different? An inference could be made from the findings in the Dead Sea scrolls that everything about Jesus, his life and his teachings and even his death fits into one of a number of patterns that were already established in the thought and beliefs of the people of his time. Could the writings of freedom fighters living in wilderness camps be responsible for the roots of Christianity? Did they write the script? If they had swelled the number of converts to Christianity, then their rituals and Messianic expectations could have been adopted as Christian beliefs. Perhaps they were the earliest Christians as Eisenman's claims.

Robert Eisenman believes that the Esenes leader, the Teacher of Righteousness, is really the code name of James,

thought to be Jesus' brother. One of his opponents, the 'Liar,' is the code name for St. Paul, the founder of modern Christianity. Eisenman finds parallels in the New Testament between the life of James and the 'Teacher of Righteousness,' and St. Paul and the 'Liar.'

All this has alarming implications for Christianity. If the scrolls really are the writings of the early Christian Church, then the information in the gospels must have been distorted. Christians believe that Jesus started a pacifist religion and urged us to love our neighbor and turn the other cheek. Eisenman believes that many of the scrolls depict a violent, aggressive group bent on vengeance. He thinks St. Paul deliberately altered Jesus' militant teachings to make them more palatable to the Romans. This is assuming in the first place that the scrolls themselves are unaltered word of God, for which there is no proof.

The Quran, the only unaltered word of God proven by the mathematical code, says the following:

Say, "We believe in God, and in what was sent down to us, and in what was sent down to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, and the Patriarchs; and in what was given to Moses and Jesus, and all the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction among any of them. To Him alone we are submitters." [2:136]

Therefore, woe to those who distort the scripture with their own hands, then say, "This is what God has revealed," seeking a cheap material gain. Woe to them for such distortion, and woe to them for their illicit gains. [2:79]

The only religion acceptable to God is Submission. [3:19]

These verses are true from the time of Adam and shall be true to the end of the world.

Ijaz Chaudry/England

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In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Submitters Perspective

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PLEASING GOD

SUBMITTERS' TRAIT

As submitters to God alone, one of our primary purposes in life is to make it to heaven by observing God's commands. As it was beautifully pointed out in one of the articles in the July 1990 Submitters Perspective, we must "Seek to Please God." Our actions in this life should be aimed solely to gain God's approval. We should dedicate our striving to God (6:162, 4:146, 16:52). It is important to avoid doing anything that may even slightly displease God.

Of course we all make mistakes, (and may God in His infinite mercy continue to forgive us in this respect) but we must make an effort to keep away from things that may not please God. Our actions and striving should be done conditional to their pleasing God. From the Quranic verses 2:265 and 30:39 it appears that even a "good" action like giving a charity only benefits those who give it seeking God's pleasure. The importance of seeking God's approval is reiterated in 5:2, 16 and 48:29. In fact, we may conclude from Verse 9:72 that attaining God's approval and blessings is the real benefit of Paradise.

God narrates to us an incident about David in 38:21-26 where David was asked by two brothers to resolve the dispute between them:

This brother of mine owns 99 sheep, while I own one sheep. He wants to mix my sheep with his, and continues to pressure me. [38:23]

David told them not to mix their properties. But afterwards he wondered whether he made the right judgment and asked God for forgiveness. In David's story we see the crucial importance of not allowing our personal opinions to sway our actions. Perhaps God is telling us something here—that even when something seems obvious, we must be God conscious and take care, rather, to strive to gain God's approval. David took extra care to eliminate the possibility of displeasing God.

Often, we may find ourselves doing or saying things that may not please God. In fact many a time, these things appear perfectly justified and "all right" when we are actually doing them, but on reflection we find that they are in violation of God's commandments. The simple things that God tells us—no backbiting, no suspicion, no ridiculing others (49:11-13), resorting to the nicest possible response (41:33-35) and debating in the nicest manner—are the ones that are easy to be overlooked. Sometimes we may feel that the other person is inflexible and we are wasting our time trying to explain things to him or her. What is forgotten is: (i) our position on the issue may be wrong and, just as we may feel that the other person is being irrational, he or she too may feel the same way about us. Therefore we must try and grasp what the other person is saying. (ii) Even if we are right, if we have truly dedicated all forms of striving to God, then no time spent in God's cause

is 'wasted.' It is part of our striving and fulfilling of duties. Another thing we forget is that we have no right to lose our temper as this immediately disqualifies us as a submitter (a clear form of *objecting* rather than *submitting* to God). In this context of the above points, let us focus on the words of 41:33-35.

Who can utter better words than one who invites to God, works righteousness, and says, "I am one of the submitters?"

Not equal is the good response and the bad response. You shall resort to the nicest possible response. Thus, the one who used to be your enemy, may become your best friend.

None can attain this except those who steadfastly persevere. None can attain this except those who are extremely fortunate. [41:33-35]

God commands us to resort to the nicest possible response. A response so nice that even a person who used to be an enemy is won over in friendship. God also tells us that this is not easy. But we have to try. Sometimes I find that when I talk about some Quranic matter and disagree with the other person, I become disagreeable as well. The latter, it would appear, is unacceptable to God. Especially when debating with submitters. God goes to the extent of saying that even when we debate with non-submitters we must do so in the

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Pleasing God *continued*

nicest possible manner (16:125, 29:46). So with submitters we should try to be even 'nicer.' We should keep in mind that Satan is always trying to divide us and drive a wedge between us. God tells us that in the following verse:

Tell my servants to treat each other in the best possible manner, for the devil will always try to drive a wedge among them. Surely, the devil is man's most ardent enemy. [17:53]

Sometimes what may start off as a small difference, could widen into a rift that is too big for us to bridge. This is just what Satan wants. Once we are divided, we are much easier prey for him. That is why, possibly, God exhorts us in the Quran to be united (3:200; 61:4; 3:102-105; 49:10-11). Unity seems to be a command, and we should not harbor any hatred towards any submitter (59:10). We are brethren and members of one big family. This is God's design and wisdom. Since individually we may not be strong enough (4:28), God strengthens us with each other. When we are together it is much easier for us to maintain our submission.

God tells us that the believing men and women are allies of one another (9:71) and that they should consult one another (42:38). He exhorts us to be with the believers (18:28) and to help one another to stay away from sin (103:3, 90:17, 5:79). Even the Friday Congregational Prayer is an opportunity for us to learn from one another. Thus it is very important for us to try and be good and nice to each other, more for our own benefit than for anyone else's.

God tells us that history and precedents may be a source of learning (40:54, 4:26, 12:111, 6:34). Thus, we have to be careful lest we are tricked by Satan once again. History has many examples of people disputing and having Satan drive a wedge between them, (although they fundamentally follow the same practices). We need to be careful and ask God for support. So far God has been merciful towards us. We must continue to strive so as to deserve this mercy. If we have doubts, we need to try and see what the Quran has to say about that particular topic. God has blessed us by sending 'a messenger in our midst' (3:164, 2:151). We should also take note of any clarifications that God may have chosen to make through His messenger. It seems from Verse 14:4 that one

of the functions of a messenger is to clarify things for us (by God's leave of course).

Finally, we should remember that God is the only One who guides whomever He wills in accordance with His knowledge. He knows our innermost thoughts and intentions. As far as He is concerned the best among the people is the most righteous (49:13) and He defines righteousness in the Quran. We should strive to be acceptable to God and ask Him to keep us among the righteous people.

Righteousness is not turning your faces towards the east or the west. Righteous are those who believe in God, the Last Day, the angels, the scripture, and the prophets; and they give the money, cheerfully, to the relatives, the orphans, the needy, the traveling alien, the beggars, and to free the slaves; and they observe the Contact Prayers (Salat) and give the obligatory charity (Zakat); and they keep their word whenever they make a promise; and they steadfastly persevere in the face of persecution, hardship, and war. These are the truthful; these are the righteous. [2:177]

Faiz Currim / India

A Story of Two Brothers

Once upon a time in a faraway place there were two brothers who shared everything, Cain and Abel. They were from one father, one mother, one God, one religion, one family, one language...

In the morning, side by side, they went to the forest

side by side, they hunted
side by side, they prepared
side by side, they ate
side by side, they prayed.

In the morning, side by side, they went to the ocean

side by side, they fished
side by side, they prepared
side by side, they ate
side by side, they prayed.

Their larder was the ocean.

Their garden was the forest.

Their farm was the nature.

Their ceiling was the sky.

Their mosque was the earth.

Their life was shared equally—their relationship brotherhood.

There was no "me," only "us."

And this is how the years passed—one God, one world, one home, one father, one mother, one love, one religion, one life. They were healthy and happy. The world was beautiful, and life was sweet.

There was no animosity, no lies, no separation.

One day, Cain gathered seeds of grain in the forest. He planted them near their home. They grew green.

There was a spark in his eyes and a new thought in his mind. His very own field. He saw the world in a different way.

Cain was no longer the same. He drew a line around the field, planted, watered, watched it grow.

Abel passed by the field, noticed the plants, became excited, walked around it, and called his brother.

"Oh dear brother, these are beautiful!" He reached down to ... A strong hand grabbed, his wrist.

"No! These are mine, not yours," Cain said.

"What do you mean brother?" Abel said in disbelief.

"I mean, These belong to me. They do not belong to you." Cain said angrily.

"Mine? Yours? Belong to me? Belong to you? What language are you speaking, who has taught you these words?"

"Satan."

[Translated from the original Farsi work of Ali Shariati by Ramtin Ghazi and Carl Howard]

Dead Sea Scrolls

We will show them our proofs in the horizons, and within themselves, until they realize that this is the truth. Is your Lord not sufficient, as a witness of all things? [41:53]

The Judean desert: the wilderness where many believe Jesus walked on his final journey to Jerusalem. But more than a century before Christ's birth, an extreme Jewish sect also retreated here.

They left behind them written evidence of their form of Judaism. Their writings describe a set of beliefs and practices that may now call into question the uniqueness of the Christian gospels. Their words may even suggest that the monastic ideal followed by Christian monks owes more to Judaism than to the inspired teachings of Jesus. True or not? Many believe the answer lies in the preserved fragments of scrolls found near the Dead Sea.

One morning in 1947 a young Arab boy was searching for his goat in caves near the Dead Sea. Inside one of these caves were several earthenware jars containing cloth-covered bundles. When he tore aside the cloth, he could see the blackened surface of a leather scroll.

Back in their camp the Bedouin unwrapped a scroll the length of one of their tents. Unknown to them, they were handling a book of Isaiah 1000 years older than any copy known to exist.

It was King Hussein's government, in what was then Jordanian East Jerusalem, that initially gave the scroll team the control of the Jewish manuscripts. They went to the French archaeological school, the Ecole Biblique, in Jerusalem, and set up a team of scholars who would prepare these manuscripts for publication. That team was led by a Dominican priest, Roland de Vaux. Although they were Jewish scrolls, the team consisted only of Christian scholars.

Father de Vaux went back to where the manuscript had been found to look for other clues about the authors of the scrolls. A mile or so away from the first cave were the remains of an ancient settlement called Qumran, long noticed, but never before investigated.

De Vaux discovered that Qumran had been inhabited over a period of about 300 years, but was abandoned when the Roman legions attacked in AD 68. In the course of his excavation Father de Vaux uncovered a number of different artifacts. The most important were earthenware jars identical to those found in the caves. When the jars were analyzed, not only were they found to be the same shape and pattern, they were also dated to the same period as the site itself. All the evidence suggested the scrolls had been written by the people living at Qumran.

De Vaux believed these were the remains of a monastic community described by first-century historians as a religious group called the Essenes, who lived on the shores of the Dead Sea. According to the scrolls, the Essenes had many things in common with today's Christians, for example baptism and sharing communal goods. There was even a ritual meal that they had in anticipation of the day when the Messiah, having blessed them, would give them bread and wine.

Forty years later the debate over links between the scrolls and Christianity had not advanced. While other scholars waited for the contents to be revealed, members of De Vaux's team were criticized for being possessive and secretive about the texts to which they alone had access. When members died, they bequeathed their rights to trusted colleagues, who themselves excluded others.

But with the grace of the Almighty this cartel crumbled. Unknown to the team, Prof. Robert Eisenman of the Middle East Religions at California State University and the director of Huntington Library had his own set of scroll photographs. He had been receiving regular deliveries from an unnamed source. Over the next 18 months Eisenman continued to receive deliveries of the unpublished texts. Two months after the Huntington Library offered free access to their negatives, Eisenman published a complete edition of his photographs—1,787 of them.

With the cartel finally broken, Eisenman decided to translate these unpublished manuscripts and contacted Michael Wise, an assistant professor of Aramaic at the University of Chicago. Michael Wise was chosen because he was a specialist in the working of Aramaic and Hebrew manuscripts and he was easy to get along with.

What Michael Wise was to discover in these unpublished scrolls was to raise disturbing questions about the uniqueness of Christian imagery and language. Not only was the Teacher of Righteousness claimed to be the Messiah by his followers but, like today's Christians, the writer believed in resurrection. This was the first reference to resurrection ever found in the Dead Sea scrolls.

Michael Wise had concentrated on scrolls that showed common links with Christianity. Robert Eisenman was more interested in those which supported his own controversial theories about the nature of the origins of Christianity.

Small pieces from eight Qumran fragments were sent to the laboratory in Zurich, which had carried out similar tests on the Turin shroud. The results confirmed earlier attempts at dating by analyzing handwriting. Six were definitely pre-Christian, another two were possibly pre-Christian. None of this material was crucial to Robert Eisenman theory.

Having discovered the first reference to resurrection in the unpublished scrolls, Eisenman and Wise sent new shockwaves through the scholarly community when they claimed to have found the first reference to the crucifixion of the Messiah.

It is possible that there was a development in the ideas about this figure over the 200 years or so during which these texts were copied down. Therefore, one might say that in later years, especially as we come up to the time of the war with Rome, there were many Messianic figures in Judaism who were being put to death. So the idea that a Messiah would die was not new.

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The Month of Ramadan
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