

‘Salvation in its essence,
depends on God’s mercy
alone.’

The Truth about Salvation

Hazrat Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad^{ra} (1889-1965), the Musleh Mau'ud (the Promised Reformer), was the son of the Promised Messiah^{as} and his second successor. He was elected as the khalifa of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in 1914 at the age of 25 and led the movement for 52 years. In the period of his khilafat, the message of Ahmadiyyat spread to countries as far and wide as the United States of America and Japan. He also set the foundations of the community's administrative structure and launched numerous initiatives for the propagation of Islam, most notably Tehrik-e-Jadid and Waqf-e-Jadid. A prolific writer, orator and the author of a ten-volume commentary of the Holy Qur'an, he leaves a profound and enduring legacy which lasts to the present day.

The Truth about Salvation

Hazrat Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad
Khalifatul-Masih II

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Note

The words in the text in regular brackets () and in between the long dashes—are the words of the author and if any explanatory words or phrases are added by the translator for the purpose of clarification, they have been placed in square brackets [].

The name of Muhammad^{sa}, the Holy Prophet of Islam, has been followed by the abbreviation ^{sa}, which is an abbreviation for the salutation *Sallallahu 'Alaihi Wasallam* (may peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The names of other prophets and messengers are followed by the abbreviation ^{as}, an abbreviation for *'Alaihis-Salam* (on whom be peace). The actual salutations have not generally been set out in full, but they should nevertheless be understood as being repeated in full in each case. The abbreviation ^{ra} is used with the names of the companions of the Holy Prophet^{sa} and those of the Promised Messiah^{as}. It stands for *Radi Allahu 'anhu, 'anha, 'anhum* (may Allah be pleased with him, with her, with them). The

abbreviation th stands for *Rahimahullahu Ta'ala* (may Allah have mercy on him). The abbreviation ^{at} stands for *Ayyadahullahu Ta'ala* (may Allah, the Mighty help him).

Because of their frequency of use and for ease of reading, Islamic terms such as *hadith* or *umma* have, for the most part, not been italicised or transliterated in the main body of the text. Anyone interested in the correct pronunciation of these words can refer to the glossary at the end of the book.

All English renditions of the verses of the Holy Qur'an have been taken from the 2004 edition of Maulawi Sher Ali's translation.

Foreword

On 25 March 1916, Hazrat Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad^{ra}, the Promised Reformer and second successor of the Promised Messiah^{as} was visited by a Christian gentleman who asked him about the truth about salvation and how it could be attained. The answer Huzoor gave was recorded in writing and published in the *Alfazl* newspaper several weeks later on 7 May.

In his response, Huzoor, compared the Christian teachings about salvation with those of Islam's and argued that the former did not accord to human nature, because human beings always seek after the highest goals. While Christianity offered a path to redemption, Islam sought to guide its followers towards the attainment of far greater objectives, that is, the rewards, blessings and pleasure of God. He also analysed the foundational principles of Christian doctrines of atonement and salvation and demonstrated the inherent contradictions and inaccuracies within them. Because of the central flaws of these tenets, it was impossible

to accept them as authentic, nor were they in any way comparable to the teachings of Islam.

The Urdu version of this text can be found in Volume III of *Anwar-ul-Uloom* under the title نجات کی حقیقت (*Nijaat ki Haqiqat*).

The Truth about Salvation

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ تَحْمَدُا وَنُصَلِّي عَلَى رَسُولِهِ الْكَرِيمِ¹

The Truth about Salvation

By Hazrat Musleh Mau'ud, Khalifatul-Masih II^{ra}

On 25 March 1916, a Christian gentleman met with Hazrat Mirza Bashir-ud-Din Mahmud Ahmad^{ra}, the Promised Reformer and second successor of the Promised Messiah^{as}, and asked him to identify the true source of salvation. The following is the answer Huzoor gave:

CHRISTIAN BELIEFS ABOUT SALVATION

I will begin with a discussion on the primary differences between Christianity and Islam regarding the concept of salvation. According to Christian beliefs about salvation, Adam^{as} committed the original sin, [the guilt of which] was then inherited by all of humanity. That is, just as a son inherits his father's wealth, the sin of Adam^{as}, who is the father of humankind, was transferred to his progeny, meaning to say to human beings. According to Christians there is no escape from this fate, and as long as people try to guard against it, they will accumulate

¹ In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful. We praise Allah, the Exalted, the Greatest, and we invoke His blessings on His Holy Messenger^{sa}. [Publishers]

further sin, because once God's law has been revealed it must be adhered to in its entirety. Even the infringement of a single commandment must incur punishment, and if God does not chastise a sinner for this, He would have to be considered unjust. However, God's mercy seeks to forgive. His love far exceeds that of a mother and father. Therefore, God proposed to crucify an innocent man who possessed divine qualities. Thus Jesus the Messiah^{as} took upon himself the punishment of the sins of humanity so that they could be forgiven, in the way a third party repays the loans owed by a borrower. According to Christian doctrine, God's justice and His love for His creation was thereby duly preserved.

THE SUPERIORITY OF ISLAMIC TEACHINGS

In contrast to this, Islam asserts that salvation is attained through one's actions. Without acquiring piety and righteousness, an individual cannot be saved from sin, wrongdoing, or weakness. In this way, salvation lies beyond the reach [of those who do not act with virtue].

There is a major difference between Islam and Christianity, in as much as the [scope] of Islamic tenets extend far beyond the mere [pursuit of] salvation itself. Christian beliefs about deliverance, and indeed those of faiths such as Buddhism and others, do not aspire to

the same high objectives when compared with Islam's superior teaching. In Islam the meagre goal of salvation holds no significance. Salvation signifies freedom from agony and torment. Yet human nature yearns not just to be saved from pain, but to also attain comfort and joy. An individual who sits on smooth ground which is free of thorns and nettles feels no discomfort, whereas a person who reclines on a settee is not only safe from discomfort, but also enjoys the pleasures of ease. Similarly, a person who does not suffer from stomach pains, or is not distressed by soreness of the eyes, can be considered to be in a comfortable state. However, it is possible that their health does not allow them to be happy or content. Therefore, as advanced by the teachings of Islam, the absence of suffering is distinct from feeling comfort and pleasure. Since human nature desires comfort, which is different from an absence of suffering, why should people not acquire it? For example, an illiterate person would not feel aggrieved by their inability to read a particular book, but an educated person would not merely be released from suffering because of this, but would derive joy from their reading. Hence, the benefit of reading is the pleasure it brings with it, rather than the divestment of misery. A further example is that of such individuals in

the world who launch grand schemes to accrue wealth. But, if a person has sufficient food and clothing then, at least in this regard, they are freed from misery. However, no one is ever satisfied with the attainment of basic provisions, because they believe that greater wealth would lead to greater ease. Therefore, the Creator (and because at the moment this is not a debate on which religion is true, by Creator it is meant the God of any religion) has invested human beings with an innate desire to seek maximum happiness.

Since this yearning is integral to human nature, it can be determined to be an act of God, by which His will can be recognised. God created eyes so that people could see; however, if a religion were to teach people to rely on their ears for sight rather than their eyes, they would immediately denounce this teaching, for God has granted sight through the latter faculty. Hence, to verify any aspect of a religion, one ought to analyse it in relation to the work of God Almighty. Religious teachings as are supported by His actions, and are reinforced by nature, ought to be accepted, and those which run in contradiction to His actions ought to be rejected.

WHICH RELIGION CONFORMS TO NATURE?

Let us now be clear that since God Almighty has made it

inherent in human nature to not only safeguard against suffering, but to also seek pleasure, then a religion which establishes tenets for both of these intrinsic features is one that conforms to human nature. Alternatively, a religion which merely exhorts people to avoid suffering, yet is silent on the means of attaining pleasure is not consistent with nature, but suggests that its creator has no knowledge of the human condition. God has provided human beings with the means to fulfil the capabilities He has invested within them. For example, the function of the stomach is digestion; therefore, it is provided with food. Eyes have the ability to see, therefore, light exists to assist them in this purpose. Ears have the ability to hear, and are aided in this by the air. Similarly, specific means have been created to serve the capabilities of the soul.

ISLAM WORKS TOWARDS SALVATION AND PROSPERITY

The natural inclination of the soul is not just to safeguard against sorrow, but also to pursue comfort. A religion which focuses only on salvation and protection from pain, fulfils only half of its function, because the two demands of the soul are salvation and ease. Christianity only places emphasis on saving the soul from sorrow. This is much like reassuring a person who goes out

to face an enemy that they will not suffer any harm, when in fact their confidence would be better served by assurances over not only their well-being, but also of their success in subduing the enemy. The comfort of security does not necessarily equate to complete happiness. The highest status that Islam has set as a goal is to protect oneself from sorrow and suffering. Through this one achieves success and prosperity, otherwise known as the state of well-being. Well-being means to feel relief and comfort through triumph and progress. Therefore, Islam not only guides towards saving oneself from sorrow, but indicates the path to comfort. This is the primary and principle difference between Islam and Christianity.

Christian preachers strive to draw people towards salvation with all the force at their disposal, whereas the Holy Qur'an says:

أُولَئِكَ عَلَىٰ هُدًى مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ ۗ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ²

Those who follow the commandments of Islam are among the rightly guided who thrive in all the distinct stages of spirituality. Moreover, they are the ones who achieve their goals and aspirations. They occupy a status

² It is they who follow the guidance of their Lord and it is they who shall prosper. *Surah Al-Baqarah*, 2:6 [Publishers]

which is beyond that of a mere release from sorrow. It is true that Christianity also speaks of the attainment of pleasure, but it is not accorded the same importance, nor given any value beyond a minor detail. Salvation is considered the ultimate goal, implying that either the authors of the Bible were limited in their ideas or that perhaps those who came after them interpolated their original words. Therein lies the chief point of departure [between Christianity and Islam].

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

Moving the discussion forward, Islam like Christianity also asserts the importance of salvation, but it is considered inferior to well-being. For example, colleges provide MA, BA, FA and entrance levels which differ in their eminence and status. Similarly, Islam also defines various stages of human life of which salvation is one, albeit it is accorded a lesser value [than others]. Both Islam and Christianity agree that salvation is part of the [cycle of life], however, Islam considers it of lesser worth, while Christianity sees it as the highest goal.

Another difference between Islam and Christianity is that the latter propounds the view that salvation can only be achieved through God's grace and not by virtue

of one's deeds, since it is impossible for an individual to follow God's commandments in their entirety. For this reason, God took the life of His son to redeem humankind for their sins. Islam too accepts that the attainment of salvation is dependent on divine grace. However, it also avers that everything has a cause from which it is derived and brought into existence. It is not possible for something to exist without a point of origin. Though in many instances people are not always aware of all of these causes, but their presence is irrefutable.

It is also the case that sometimes the cause of something is another cause. By way of illustration, let us consider the case of an employer who contracts a labourer on a fixed daily wage. The harder the labourer works, the better he will be able to fulfil the obligations of his work. By being inactive, he might be acting dishonestly, but alternatively, no matter how hard his exertions, he would not have the right to ask for a greater wage, unless he worked overtime in which case he could ask for an appropriate amount of more pay. However, if the employer happily acknowledges the performance of his worker through a discretionary bonus, the supplementary payment would not be considered as part of his original wages, but would

emanate from the grace and mercy of the employer. But why is this grace and mercy afforded to one labourer and not to others? Because through his hard work and effort the labourer drew it upon himself. This grace and mercy was not the outcome of his work, as his entitled wage came to him through his daily remuneration. Instead, he caused it to happen through his own efforts. Islam upholds a similar ideal, meaning to say that salvation is the result of God's grace which is drawn in by good deeds. And all aspects of the world adhere to the principle that though A might not be the result of B, it is certainly caused by it.

Let us take another example. The salaries paid by the government to members of its armed forces are a recompense for their endeavours in the field of battle. But those soldiers who display exceptional valour while fighting are honoured with a variety of other rewards. When soldiers are recruited, they are expected to fight for their country even at the cost of their lives, so why then do governments grant further rewards? Because they are pleased with a particular service they have rendered. In this sense, a government's reward should not be considered compensation for a soldier's endeavours, but their efforts result in the reward granted.

The granting of salvation by God Almighty is similar to this. People perform good deeds, even as they possess frailties and weaknesses. However, when individuals ardently strive to undertake acts of virtue, they attract the mercy and grace of God Almighty, and subsequently attain salvation. We are witness to the fact that in worldly endeavours when a person works particularly hard they draw the mercy and appreciation of their employer. Thus it is not possible for a person to strive to win the pleasure of God Almighty and not attain His mercy.

GOOD DEEDS ARE NECESSARY FOR SALVATION

Therefore, according to our beliefs, good deeds are essential in drawing near the grace of God, and it is through His grace that one can attain salvation. There can be no salvation without the exercise of actions. For example, when an individual shows mercy towards another, it is because the sadness of their plight drew the mercy of the former. All things are achieved through certain means. Good deeds are the foremost means by which God's mercy is attained. It is for this reason that Islam puts such emphasis on personal conduct. However, salvation in its essence, depends on God's mercy alone. The Holy Prophet^{sa} was once asked if his

redemption would ensue from the excellence of his conduct. He replied that it too would come from God's grace.³ There is no one higher in excellence than the Holy Prophet^{sa}, therefore, if he regarded God's mercy as the cause of his salvation, then it is inconceivable that anyone else could depend on their deeds for their redemption. Nevertheless, good conduct is necessary to draw God's grace, and it is this principle which is forwarded by Islam. One may compare this with Christian theology and decide for themselves which of the two presents the more cogent argument.

Christianity claims salvation is unattainable because human beings are sinful and cannot fully adhere to the law of God. They consider even minor infringements as acts of wrongdoing and, therefore, think it impossible for anyone to follow the law in its entirety. Since no one can succeed in this, it is essential for people to be reprimanded for their sins. Just as governments punish those who break the law, anyone who defies the commandments of God must also be punished. According to this principle, salvation is unattainable by following the law. However, Christians are mistaken [in their commitment to this form of reasoning]. The idea that it is necessary to adhere to the fullness of the

³ *Muslim*, p. 1226, 2000 Riyadh, hadith no. 7116. [Publishers]

law to attain salvation has led them to believe that since it is impossible for human beings to fulfil this requisite duty, God does not grant salvation at all. Islam, on the other hand, avers that God is indifferent to whether human beings worship Him or not, and His being is independent of this. God remains unaffected by an individual who worships Him or follows the law. Even if the whole world were to give over their days and nights in extolling Him, this would have no effect on the glory of His existence. And even if the whole world were to sink into wrongdoing and transgression, it would not diminish His grandeur. God Almighty did not reveal the law to sustain Himself, but instead because it was necessary for people. Adherence to the law is meant to benefit individuals. God did not reveal the law just so people could strive to follow its commandments, but also as a means by which humankind could interact and have communion with Him; it forges the potentiality of individuals through their good conduct, thereby cleansing their souls so that they can develop a relationship with God Almighty.

The law of God cannot, therefore, be compared with the laws enacted by a state. The purpose of government is to ensure laws are followed to uphold public order. If people, for example, begin to steal, pilfer, or appropriate,

the government would lose its authority. However, even if the whole world rejects the divine law and disobeys it, God would still remain God. His sanctity and magnificence would not be affected in the slightest; therefore, trying to draw comparisons between the two is mistaken. A government depends on the compliance of its citizens, but God is not reliant on humankind to follow His law. God has created the law through His mercy and grace, so that those who abide by it are able to build a relationship with Him.

DIVINE LAWS ARE LIKE UNIVERSITY COURSES

Divine laws can be likened to university courses. For example, a university might teach a historical textbook written by a certain author. Here, its purpose is not to teach the exact version of history propounded by the writer, but rather to increase the knowledge of their students to some extent with regards to that particular historical subject. Hence reading lists continuously change and those books that are considered appropriate and beneficial are the ones that are taught. Then once a course is complete the university examines its students. However, no student can answer every question correctly. Yet, every year thousands of students pass their exams despite all of them having made mistakes. This is

because a university's purpose is not to have their students answer every single question, but to build on their skills. A student passes when their proficiency has reached a certain level.

Divine laws are similar to this, in that God Almighty sets out rules so that people may develop the capacity to build a relationship with Him. For example, the purpose of *salat* is not to perform certain postures, but rather the purification of a person. The purpose of fasting is not to enter a state of hunger, but to increase in righteousness. Similarly, all such requirements of faith fulfil a deeper function. When a person performs them up to a point that the relevant strengths and capacities are inculcated within them, they are deemed to have passed the test. Again, turning to the example of universities, these institutions set certain pass marks, be it 40, 60, or 80 per cent, and those students who attain these scores are successful in their exams. In a similar vein, when it comes to matters of the divine law, the capabilities produced within a person are taken into account.

Christians ask: Does not every commandment of the law which emanates from God Almighty, deserve its due adherence? In the context of a university exam, however, they do not demand similar requirements of answering each question perfectly. The fact is, just as

a university passes a student based on their level of learning even without them being able to answer every single question, an individual can also attain salvation despite not following the divine law in its entirety, because they were able to create a capacity within themselves. Furthermore, similar to a student with higher marks passing with distinction, an individual that increases their capacity by following the edicts of the law is considered of a higher stature.

IF SALVATION AND THE LAW ARE UNRELATED, WHY DO
CHRISTIANS BELIEVE IN STAGES OF SPIRITUALITY?

Similarly, there are different stages leading to God Almighty and Christians also believe this; they differentiate between the prophets according to their status. The rank given to Abraham^{as} in Christianity is not ascribed to any other prophet. However, if salvation is unrelated to conduct, then a person's standing ought to be irrelevant. On the contrary Islam defines status through conduct. The Holy Qur'an says:

وَالْوَزْنُ يَوْمَئِذٍ بِالْحَقِّ ۚ فَمَنْ ثَقُلَتْ مَوَازِينُهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ۝ وَمَنْ خَفَّتْ
مَوَازِينُهُ فَأُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ خَسِرُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ ۚ بِمَا كَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا يَتْلُمُونَ ۝⁴

⁴ And the weighing on that day will be true. Then as for those whose

That is, the deeds of every individual will be weighed on the Day of Judgment. If individuals have forged a capacity within themselves to create a relationship with God Almighty through the accumulation of their good deeds, then their minor infringements will be forgiven. Likewise, a university passes a student despite their inability to solve all the questions put before them. This validates the assertion that by trying one's best to abide by the law, even if they sometimes fail in their endeavours, a person can still hope to achieve salvation.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO FOLLOW ALL THE COMMANDMENTS OF
THE LAW?

However, Muslims do not accept that it is impossible for anyone to follow the law in its entirety. Do the Christians (in India) follow the Indian Penal Code? Of course they do. The evidence of this is in their freedom; if they did not obey it, they would be punished for their transgressions. The laws stipulated in the Holy Qur'an are far fewer than the Indian Penal Code, therefore, how could it be impossible to follow it completely? To say that the divine law cannot be followed in its

scales are heavy, it is they who shall prosper. And as for those whose scales are light, it is they who shall have ruined their souls because of their being unjust to Our Signs. *Surah Al-A'raf*, 7:9-10 [Publishers]

entirety is erroneous. Christians deceptively ask people about their personal piety and if a person claims to be sinful out of a sense of humility, they use this as proof of the impurity of humankind. Do they not know that when the Messiah^{as} was asked:

‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone.’⁵

And this is the truth; the only absolute holy being is God alone. Only He is unblemished and free from all evil. Human beings on the other hand possess weaknesses, such as their limitations in being able to know the unseen and so on. Therefore, true purity belongs only to God Almighty. However, this does not mean that no pious person has ever lived, or that no one can attain righteousness. In truth righteous people claim to be sinful out of humility; they fear arrogance and pride, both of which can lead a person to ruin. Such claims are made to save themselves from evil, not because they are guilty of wrongdoing. Otherwise, thousands of prophets have claimed to be pure from sin. A further point to be noted here is that an individual who confesses their sins does so in

⁵ *Luke*, New Revised Standard Version, 18:18-19 [Publishers]

relation to God Almighty's [holy being]. For example, an oil lamp possesses brightness, but its light is incomparable to that of the sun. The same applies to human beings. There were, and still are, many people who have followed the divine law in its entirety. This proves that not only is it possible to follow the law, but also that there is no commandment which cannot be adhered to. Is adultery an unavoidable sin? Or are thievery, robbery, lying, murder, or slander impossible to keep away from? Certainly not. A God-fearing person can protect themselves from these sins. The only argument that Christians possess, is that humility and self-effacement are proof that human beings cannot save themselves from sin. However, this is a weak argument. For example, if one says to an individual that they are free from all evil, they will naturally reject this statement out of humility, and will claim that they are in fact sinful. However, if they are asked whether they follow the Indian Penal Code in its entirety, they will respond in the affirmative, and will not claim to have disobeyed it. Why is this so? Because they feel no embarrassment in saying this. They know that the Penal Code is a set of rules defined by human beings, and humans are not such elevated creatures that it would be inappropriate to make such a claim.

However, their response to a question about the divine law is humble and modest because they are conscious of God Almighty.

HUMAN BEINGS HAVE NOT INHERITED SIN

Further, it is wrong to believe that because human beings inherited sin, they cannot free themselves of it. If sin was indeed inherited, how did Adam^{as} first acquire it? And if he sinned of his own volition, would it not be more appropriate to accept that all other human beings are responsible for their own wrongdoings?

If people inherit sin they cannot be held accountable for it. Is an illegitimate child, for example, destined for hell because they were born out of the adultery of their parents? Certainly not, because no fault lies with the child. The responsibility rests with the parents. A person cannot be punished for something bequeathed to them by their parents, and if this were the case, then all human beings would meet with [immediate] salvation as they would not be responsible for any of their sins, rather they would have inherited them. On the other hand, if we were to accept that people do not inherit sin, but commit acts of wrongdoing of their own accord, then no one would be able to achieve salvation as per the teachings of Christianity.

Therefore, this particular Christian belief is without foundation.

ATONEMENT AND INHERITED SIN

When it is put to Christians that human beings are responsible for their own sins, they say that whereas people can be forgiven for their own wrongdoings, they cannot save themselves from inherited sin unless they believe in atonement. However, this notion is flawed; the offence from which inherited sin emerged was committed by Adam^{as} and for which the following was suggested as a punishment:

The LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.' To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.' And to the man he said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree

about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread.’⁶

Let us now turn to the question of whether these aforementioned punishments have come to an end through belief in atonement. If this were the case then belief in atonement would serve a purpose and benefit, otherwise there is no proof that it leads to salvation from inherited sin.

Because of inherited sin, the serpent [which misled Adam^{as} and Eve^{as}] was given the following punishment:

Upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.

Since Christians cannot show that belief in atonement is current amongst serpents, serpents cannot be relieved of their punishment.

⁶ *Genesis*, New Revised Standard Version, 3:14-19 [Publishers]

Then there is the case of men and women. The punishment prescribed for women was:

I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.

If belief in atonement could relieve women from these punishments, then we would assume this doctrine was correct. However, no Christian woman has been released from these pains. How then can we accept its authenticity? Similarly, no man has been relieved of his prescribed punishments through this belief. If atonement fails to mitigate punishment in the present life, how can it be expected to do so in the hereafter? According to Christians, these are the signs of salvation, and yet they do not appear to have been fulfilled on any Christians themselves, thereby nullifying the truth of the concept of atonement. If atonement is thus falsified, so is the belief that it can lead to salvation.

HOW CAN WE ATTAIN ATONEMENT IF THE MESSIAH^{AS} DID
NOT AGREE TO SACRIFICE HIS LIFE?

Regarding Jesus the Messiah^{as} the Bible says:

Then he said to them, ‘I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me.’ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; Yet not what I want but what you want.’⁷

This suggests that the Messiah^{as} was forcefully put on the cross. Christians argue that while his soul was ready [for crucifixion] his body was frail, but if that were the case, the body ought to have been saved since it did not wish to be put on the cross, and yet it was still punished. If the argument that the Messiah^{as}, despite his unwillingness, was put on the cross for the atonement of humankind’s sins is to be believed, then any other community can also claim that the murder of one of their people was for their own atonement. This is a feeble contention, and until we have a reasonable argument in favour of atonement, it is unacceptable.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ATONEMENT AND SACRIFICE

When Christians are unable to support their claims, they object that the concept of sacrifice is also existent in Islam. They ask that if the sacrifice of a goat can lead

⁷ *Mathew*, New Revised Standard Version, 26:38-39 [Publishers]

to one's sins being forgiven, why can't the sacrifice of Jesus the Messiah^{as} also be a cause for pardon? However, when making this objection, they fail to keep in mind the differences between the sacrifice of a goat and the crucifixion of Jesus the Messiah^{as}. We do not claim that sacrificing an animal relieves the burden of our sins. Nor do we claim that the animal is sacrificed as a punishment for our sins. Instead, our claim is that we are sacrificing part of our wealth in order to attain God Almighty's pleasure, in the hope that He will then forgive us our sins. Let me clarify this further: the sacrifice we make is that of our wealth, and secondly, we do this for the sake of God Almighty. Thirdly, we hope that this good deed will attain God Almighty's pleasure, and, thereby, He will pardon us.

However, these points do not apply in the matter of Jesus'^{as} crucifixion, because (i) he is not anyone's possession for them to claim that their sins will be pardoned through his sacrifice and (ii) nor are they the ones who sacrificed him. The only person that benefits from a sacrifice is the one who undertakes it and no one else. The Jews sacrificed Jesus the Messiah^{as}. For this, Christians claim that the Jews will go to hell, and that they themselves have achieved salvation through the sacrifice made by the Jews. If Jesus the

Messiah^{as} is God's son then the Christians have no claim over him. Since the Jews crucified him, and not the Christians, therefore, it is they who should benefit from it. However, Christians claim the opposite of this; they believe that by simply believing in his death, they attain salvation. For this reason, the Christian concept regarding salvation cannot be taken as correct in any way.

THE LAW IS A MERCY NOT A CURSE

Instead, there is no room for doubt or suspicion in the approach taught by Islam. As I have already mentioned, Islam has expounded on the commandments of the divine law so that human beings can find peace and solace by following it, and save themselves from difficulty. It is much the same as the way railway operators have created timetables which inform people that those who turn up at a scheduled time will be able to purchase tickets and take the relevant train to their desired destination. Yet still, if somebody complains about this, and says that taking the train to a particular destination would cause them difficulty, then they would be considered most foolish. The same is true of the law. It would have been a curse if it contained such provisions that hurt people. But in Islam there

is no such commandment that brings harm to people instead of benefit. Is theft, which has been forbidden by Islam, an act of virtue? Can adultery, which has been prohibited, be considered a good deed? Or can lying be considered something excellent even though it has been deemed a wrong? Definitely not.

This then is the case with all the commandments of the law which are essentially reference points or a guidebook [to living a better life]. If God Almighty Himself did not reveal the evils within the things He has forbidden, then human beings would only have recognised their ill effects after many years of experiencing and struggling with their negative consequences. Yet, by way of a gift, God Almighty disclosed them directly to people. How unfortunate that Christians have declared this divine gift to be a curse, whereas in truth, through His mercy, God disclosed the commandments and teachings of the law to the people as rules to be followed. Human beings do not possess the capacity to reach the best conclusion in everything. Therefore, God showed them that if He had not revealed to them the divine law, they would have suffered immensely and performed such deeds which, apart from just grief, would have brought them affliction as well. Nor would they have undertaken

such actions as would have been beneficial to them and brought them great prosperity.

ISLAM LEADS TO THE RECOGNITION OF GOD AND SHOWS
THE PATHWAYS OF SALVATION

Islam not only teaches us the difference between benefit and ruin, but also on how to practice these good deeds and save ourselves from torment. This is because our everyday experience of the world shows us that merely warning a person of danger and loss is not sufficient, because until one commits a wrong deed, they are unaware of its harmful consequences. In such a situation, a higher power is required to adequately restrain them from committing the act in this state (of unawareness). For example, when a child puts their hand into a fire, it burns. But if their parents are watching over them, they would prevent the child from doing so. Why? This is because the effect of pain from fire is concealed from the child who does not have adequate knowledge regarding the pain that the fire causes. Yet, if the child fears being reprimanded from their parents, they would refrain from doing this. People are less fearful of those things that are not completely known to them, even if they are aware of the dangers. To actually experience and see something instils fear. For example, we see that

even thieves refrain from stealing in the presence of the police. Similarly, a religion that can visualise God, can lead to salvation from sin. One who follows such a religion would continue to commit sins because of their lack of comprehensive awareness, but upon acquiring knowledge of their consequences they would eventually start refraining from wrongdoing, and when they would attain complete knowledge of this, they would eschew sin altogether. The only religion conforming to this is Islam. Firstly, Islam proves the existence of God through rational arguments. Furthermore, in every era, there have been followers of Islam who have shown signs to prove the existence of God Almighty. All the prophets of the past showed signs to prove the existence of a living God. According to Christianity, after the Messiah^{as}, no one was able to achieve this and the world stopped giving birth to such people, and so the concept of atonement was introduced. Yet, the advent of prophets has always been the most substantive way of proving the existence of a living God, and it is the prophets who show the path to salvation for humankind.

PEOPLE ATTAINED SALVATION EVEN BEFORE THE
ATONEMENT OF CHRIST

Was salvation unattainable in the time of Moses^{as} when

the concept of atonement had not been introduced? If anyone were to claim that Moses^{as} achieved salvation because he believed in the atonement of Jesus^{as}, then I could also very well claim that he attained salvation because he believed in me. Christians do not have any evidence that Moses^{as} believed in atonement through Jesus^{as} and, therefore, both their assertion and my own would be equally acceptable. But, Christians believe that Abraham^{as}, Moses^{as}, Jacob^{as}, Isaac^{as}, and all other prophets were saved despite the concept of atonement never having existed in their time. Therefore, it can be deduced that their salvation was the result of the law, and not through atonement; their law had the same purpose, which was to show the truth of a living God.

Islam makes the same assertion. First, it testifies to God Almighty's existence through rational arguments. Once an individual initiates belief and starts following Islamic commandments, they are able to recognise God. God's help is given to them, and they are informed about events of the future. They are saved from sin and attain salvation and achieve success as well; this is what Islam teaches about the path to redemption.

GOD'S BENEVOLENCE DOES NOT MAKE HIM UNJUST

Christians claim that, just as a magistrate would be

deemed unjust for acquitting a criminal, the same would be true if God exonerated a sinner. However, the difference between God and a magistrate is immense. When a criminal is presented before a magistrate it is not because they have wronged the magistrate, but committed an offence against the government; the magistrate cannot exonerate them of their own volition. On the other hand, a sin committed by a person is an act against God, and therefore, He can choose to forgive it. Besides, the claim that courts do not pardon criminals is inaccurate, since there are many instances in which those who are guilty are reprieved because of various reasons. Only recently, the court sentenced some criminals to death, but the viceroy then changed the sentence to life imprisonment. Is there anyone who can claim that this did not happen? Certainly not! Moreover, another reason why courts do not acquit criminals is their inability to determine whether a claim to remorse is genuine or made out of pretence to save themselves from punishment. An exonerated criminal could turn out to be a repeat offender. But God Almighty has knowledge of even the smallest things; He knows whether the remorseful sinner will refrain from sins. Therefore, there should not be any objection against God for pardoning an individual. According to Islam

God accepts sincere repentance.

At the conclusion of Huzoor's address, the Christian gentleman⁸ who asked the initial question proceeded to enquire over the Qur'anic assertion that God sets a seal over the hearts and ears of people and when this is the case, how could such people achieve salvation? Huzoor responded in the following terms:

Nowhere does the Qur'an say that people are born inherently evil. The passage which speaks of a seal set over their hearts and ears possesses a different meaning. For example, the human hand has the ability to grasp things, but there is a group amongst the Hindus who so incapacitate their hands that they lose this ability. Who is to blame for this? Those who perpetrate this act. But who incapacitated the hand? God. If God was unwilling to do so, He could have prevented it. Instead, according to the law of God, He revokes His blessings from those who are ungrateful. The passage you have referred to applies to such people when it says:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَأَنذَرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ۝ خَتَمَ اللَّهُ

عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ وَعَلَى سَمْعِهِمْ ۗ وَعَلَى أَبْصَارِهِمْ غِشَاوَةٌ ۖ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ۙ⁹

⁸ By the Grace of God after listening to Huzoor's answer on this subject the gentleman in question became an Ahmadi. [Publishers]

⁹ Those who have disbelieved—it being equal to them whether thou

That is, for the disbelievers it is alike whether you warn them or warn them not; they will not listen. Until they pay heed, it is as if they have a seal set upon their hearts and ears. The people referred to in the former part of the verse are the same as the ones about whom Allah the Exalted says that there is a seal set upon their hearts and ears. God Almighty has blessed every human being with a spiritual capacity. However, they are responsible if they fail to utilise it or if they waste it. Therefore, those who do not contemplate and follow God Almighty's words, despite being informed of them, lose their capabilities; then, it is alike whether you warn them or not. Such people are not hamstrung by an inability to seek guidance, rather they choose to go astray themselves.

warn them or warn them not—they will not believe. Allah has set a seal on their hearts and their ears, and over their eyes is a covering; and for them is a great punishment. *Surah Al-Baqarah*, 2:7-8 [Publishers]

Glossary

Hadith or *Ḥadīth* (حَدِيث) the recorded sayings and traditions of the Holy Prophet^{sa}.

Hazrat or *Ḥadrat* (حَضْرَت) an honorific Arabic title.

Khalifa or *Khalīfah* (خَلِيفَه) a term used for Islamic spiritual leaders, particularly the successors of the Holy Prophet^{sa} and the Promised Messiah^{as}.

Khalifatul-Masih or *Khalīfatul-Masīḥ* (خَلِيفَةُ الْمَسِيح) a title conferred on the spiritual successors of the Promised Messiah^{as}.

Khilafat or *Khilāfat* (خِلَافَت) institution led by a supreme spiritual head known as the khalifa.

Salat or *Ṣalāt* (صَلَاة) the obligatory Islamic prayer.

