

The Quran and its Message

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سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ

Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

FOLLOWING THE 'KUFFAR' (DISBELIEVERS)

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QUESTION

We are told not to follow or imitate the Kuffar (Disbelievers). Does this mean we should not imitate the Christians or Jews in any way as they are also Kuffar? What is your take on this from your understanding of the Quran's position? Please can you elaborate.

ANSWER - Joseph Islam

Indeed, many Muslims make an unwarranted connection between the Kuffar, Christians and Jews which is not supported by the Quran.

The Jews and Christians that follow their faith are referred to by the Quran as 'Ahl-e-Kitab' i.e. People of the Book, **not** 'Kuffars'. From the Quran's perspective, even the Mushrikeen (idolaters) are not necessarily Kuffar until the following maxim is satisfied against them by Divine judgment.

Once a truth is made absolutely manifest to one, that there is no reason left to deny it and they still reject it, then one enters the state of 'kufr'.

Please see related article [1] below

There are numerous verses which support the above maxim and it is a concept well established by the Quran.

One is not culpable for what one does not know. To claim otherwise is neither just nor is it true. The following verse powerfully underscores this point with respect to the idolaters (Mushrikeen) who were not automatically branded as 'Kuffar' as they were simply ignorant.

009:006

“And if anyone of the idolaters seeks thy protection (O Muhammad), then protect him so that he may hear the Word of God, and afterward convey him to his place of safety. That is because they are a folk who do not know”

Therefore, as is evident from the above verse, 'Kuffar' is not even a term that can be attributed automatically to the idolaters, let alone the Christians and Jews. Disbelief or 'Kufr' is only a state entered into once a message of truth has been completely manifested and unequivocally understood by the recipient and yet, it is still denied.

Once that denial has occurred (and Only God knows best when those conditions have been fully satisfied given all one's faculties, circumstances, understanding and clarity of message), then the heart is sealed and that individual is branded a 'Kaffir' by God.

This is not a judgment a human can make, but only God. It is also only God that can make known to His appointed messengers those that have been branded as 'Kuffar' by His decree. This too only if He so wills.

God's appointed messengers deliver the message with utmost clarity. Prophet Muhammad ^(pbuh) was such a God appointed messenger and it is in this context and capacity that the Quran was being delivered to a specific audience.

Those that heard from him directly received the message with clarity. This is also the case with all the messengers that came before him who in effect acted as 'witnesses' against their people as Muhammad ^(pbuh) did against his own Arabic speaking folk.

073.015

“Indeed! We have sent to you a messenger as witness against you, even as We sent to Pharaoh a messenger”

014:004

"We sent an apostle except (to teach) in the language of his (own) people in order to make (things) clear to them. Now God leaves straying those whom He pleases and guides whom He pleases: and He is Exalted in power Full of Wisdom"

The purpose of God's messengers was **only** to deliver the message in truth and with clarity. Hence messengers were sent to communities and spoke in the language of their own people. It is in this capacity that the prophets acted as leaders and truth bearers.

002.272

"The guiding of them is not thy duty (O Muhammad), but God guides whom He will..."

024:054

“Say: Obey God and obey the Messenger; but if you turn back, then on him rests that which is imposed on him and on you rests that which is imposed on you; and if you obey him, you are on the right way; and nothing rests on the Messenger but clear delivering (of the message)”

Now, having summarised the Quran's position on Kuffar, it can be clearly seen that no one can be branded a 'Kuffar' let alone the Christians and Jews who are referred to by the Quran as 'Ahl-e-Kitab' (People of the Book).

To take an alternative position, verses will have to be misquoted and taken out of context.

The Quran's appeal to the primary audience was for them not to obey the 'Kuffar' (who were amongst them) as they would cause them to turn back in faith to idolatry or disbelief. This is Kufr in its ultimate form, to turn back on one's heels after the truth has been made manifest.

003:149

“O ye who believe! If ye obey the Unbelievers, they will drive you back on your heels, and ye will turn back (from Faith) to your own loss”

Indeed, guidance is given against 'certain' members of those that align themselves to Christianity or Judaism, but the Quran is absolutely clear that **not all of them were or are necessarily bad or evil**. The following verses make this absolutely clear.

003:113

"**Not all of them are alike:** Of the People of the Book are a portion that stand (For the right): They rehearse the Signs of God all night long, and they prostrate themselves in adoration."

003.114

"They believe in God and the Last Day; they enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong; and they hasten (in emulation) in (all) good works: They are in the ranks of the righteous"

005.082

"Strongest among men in enmity to the believers you will find the Jews and Pagans; and nearest among them in love to the believers you will find those who say, "**We are Christians**": because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant."

005.083

"**And when they listen to the revelation received by the Messenger, thou will see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognise the truth:** they pray: "Our Lord! we believe; write us down among the witnesses."

The next verse beautifully contextualises specifically the Jews. (i.e. that not **all** of them are bad or ones that misguide).

007.159

"Of the people of Moses **there is a section who guide and do justice in the light of truth.**"

005.066

"If only they had stood fast by the Law, the Gospel, and all the revelation that was sent to them from their Lord, they would have enjoyed happiness from every side. **There is from among them a party on the right course:** but many of them follow a course that is evil."

003.075

"Among the People of the Book are some who, **if entrusted with a hoard of gold, will (readily) pay it back;** others, who, if entrusted with a single silver coin, will not repay it unless thou constantly stand demanding, because, they say, "there is no call on us (to keep faith) with these ignorant (Pagans)." but they tell a lie against God, and (well) they know it."

It is difficult to argue from a Quran's perspective, that to follow such righteous Christians or Jews as depicted by the verses above is not within the spirit of Islam. The Quran makes it clear that the **same** religion that was inspired in all the Prophets, including Prophets Moses and Jesus. ^(pbut)

042:013

"The same religion (**Arabic: Deen**) has He established (**Arabic: Shara'a**) for you as that which He enjoined on Noah - the which We have sent by inspiration (**Arabic: Awhayna (wahi)**) to you - and that which We enjoined on Abraham, **Moses**, and **Jesus**: Namely, that you should remain steadfast in religion, and make no divisions therein: to those who worship other things than God, hard is the (way) to which thou call them. God chooses to Himself those whom He pleases, and guides to Himself those who turn (to Him)"

The followers of these Prophets were exposed to **the same religion** that the followers of Muhammad ^(pbuh) were exposed to.

Many Muslims also incorrectly quote the following verse to infer that Christians and Jews follow a different religion.

002:120

"Never will the Jews or the Christians be satisfied with you **unless you follow their form of religion (Arabic: Millatahum)**. Say: "The Guidance of God,-that is the (only) Guidance." Were you to follow their desires after the knowledge which has reached thee, then you would find neither Protector nor helper from God"

Reading the above popular translation, one would think this verse contradicts 42:13 just quoted. If one reads and studies the Arabic however, one will note that there is **no** mention of 'religion' in the above verse. However, this particular English translator clearly indicates that it is not 'religion' per se that he is referring to, but a '**form**' of religion.

The word for religion is 'deen' and it is not the word used here. The word used in 2:120 is 'Millatahum' from the word 'millat'

وَلَنْ تَرْضَىٰ عَنْكَ الْيَهُودُ وَلَا النَّصَارَىٰ حَتَّىٰ تَتَّبِعَ مِلَّتَهُمْ

Millatahum

Illustration - Joseph Islam

The word 'millat' has been used many times in the Quran to signify a creed, a dictate, a particular practice or way of following a religion. Even in Islam we have many ways to practice Islam. It is one 'deen' but it contains many forms or 'millats' within it. Not all 'millats' are necessarily following correct guidance or a path that is true.

مِلَّةٌ *A religion ; (Ş, Mşb, K ;) a way of belief and practice in respect of religion. (T, &c.)*
— See 8.

Source: Edward Lanes Lexicon [1]

This can clearly be seen in the verse which commands the Prophet to follow the 'millat' (creed or way) of Prophet Abraham. ^(pbuh) This is not another religion but the **same** religion which was inspired in all Prophets of God.

016:123

"So We have taught thee the inspired (Message), "Follow the ways (Arabic: Millata) of Abraham the True in Faith, and he joined not gods with God.""

There is powerful wisdom to extract from the above verse. One may be part of the same 'deen' but their way 'millat' may not be of the way of Prophet Abraham, ^(pbuh) which the Quran expresses as the true way. This applies to **Muslims** as much as it applies to Jews or Christians.

What was Prophet Abraham's ^(pbuh) way?

As is clear from verse 16:123, **he did not join anything with God.** This includes partnerships, idols, or intercessors. **See related article [2] below.**

Related Articles:

- (1) [Understanding Kufr \(Disbelief\) from a Quranic Perspective](#)
- (2) [Idolatry According to the Quran](#)

REFERENCES

[1] LANE. E.W, **Edward Lanes Lexicon, Williams and Norgate 1863; Librairie du Liban Beirut-Lebanon 1968, Volume 8, Supplement, Page 3023**

Highlights marked in red on the lexicon excerpt are my own insertions. They have no bearing on the original text other than they emphasise relevance to the topic at hand. These are merely illustrations and have solely been utilised for educational and explanatory purposes.

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