

# Tolerance in Christianity and Islam

By

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## Tolerance in Christianity and Islam

Controversy sometimes breaks out between Christians and Muslims over which divine message is more tolerant. Some Christians argue that Christianity is more tolerant than Islam.

Therefore, we will indicate how tolerant those two divine messages are without bias towards Islam for we, Muslims, believe in both two messages and their two prophets, but, in our belief in them, we just take into consideration the fact that the former message (Christianity) was associated with a certain place, time and nation, whereas the latter (Islam) one applies to each nation every time, everywhere.

We will make clear that both messages are characterized by tolerance without discrimination. Yet, each message had its own circumstances relating to space, time, environment and empowerment. Therefore, it is not fair to claim that one message is more tolerant than the other given the difference in the circumstances of each of them.

We will explain how tolerant those two messages are towards the fellow followers of the same message on the one hand and towards the followers of the other faiths and religions on the other hand.



## Tolerance towards the Followers of the Same Message

We often hear some Christian friends arguing that Christianity is more tolerant than Islam and that Christians are more tolerant towards one another than Muslims are. They support their argument with some statements attributed to Jesus in the New Testament.

### Evidence of Tolerance in Christianity

According to those Christians, such statements reflect matchless tolerance towards the fellow followers of the same message. The following statements of Jesus cited in the New Testament are usually offered by Christians as evidence for the unique tolerance among Christians.

“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back.” (Luke 6:27-30)

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“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” (Matthew 5:38-44)

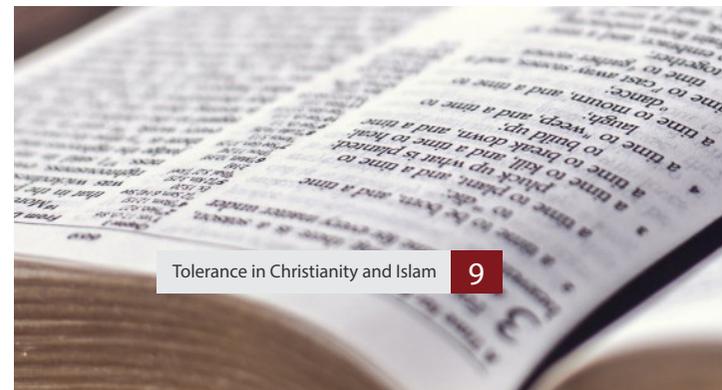
## Discussion of Tolerance Evidence in Christianity

However, upon hearing the above verses of the New Testament, the following questions arise quite directly and automatically: must each Christian always put those verses into practice? Can he put them into practice on the ground? Do those verses mean that it is lawful to take a Christian as an enemy and so he may be hated, cursed, mistreated, slapped, stripped of his clothes and property, and even persecuted?

Must a Christian always tolerate enmity, hate, curse, mistreatment, and beating and allow the other to strip him of his clothes and property without any claim for recovery and to persecute him and refrain from resisting evil in general? What if a Christian cannot tolerate that? Can he sue the other?

Of course, it is crystal clear that the above verses do not introduce binding or incumbent legal rulings for Christians, given their apparent inapplicability. Those and similar verses just communicate such exhortations, admonitions, morals, ethics and values which believers in Jesus are recommended to put into practice.

Those verses cannot be put into practice by most people, nor can they underlie



a law binding on all people for a law is supposed to be such a feasible law to which everybody can adhere no matter how faithful or devout a person may be.

It is well-known that Christians follow the law of Prophet Moses, that is to say the rulings of Moses' law mostly apply to Christians according to Jesus himself. In the New Testament, Jesus is quoted as saying: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." (Matthew 5:17)

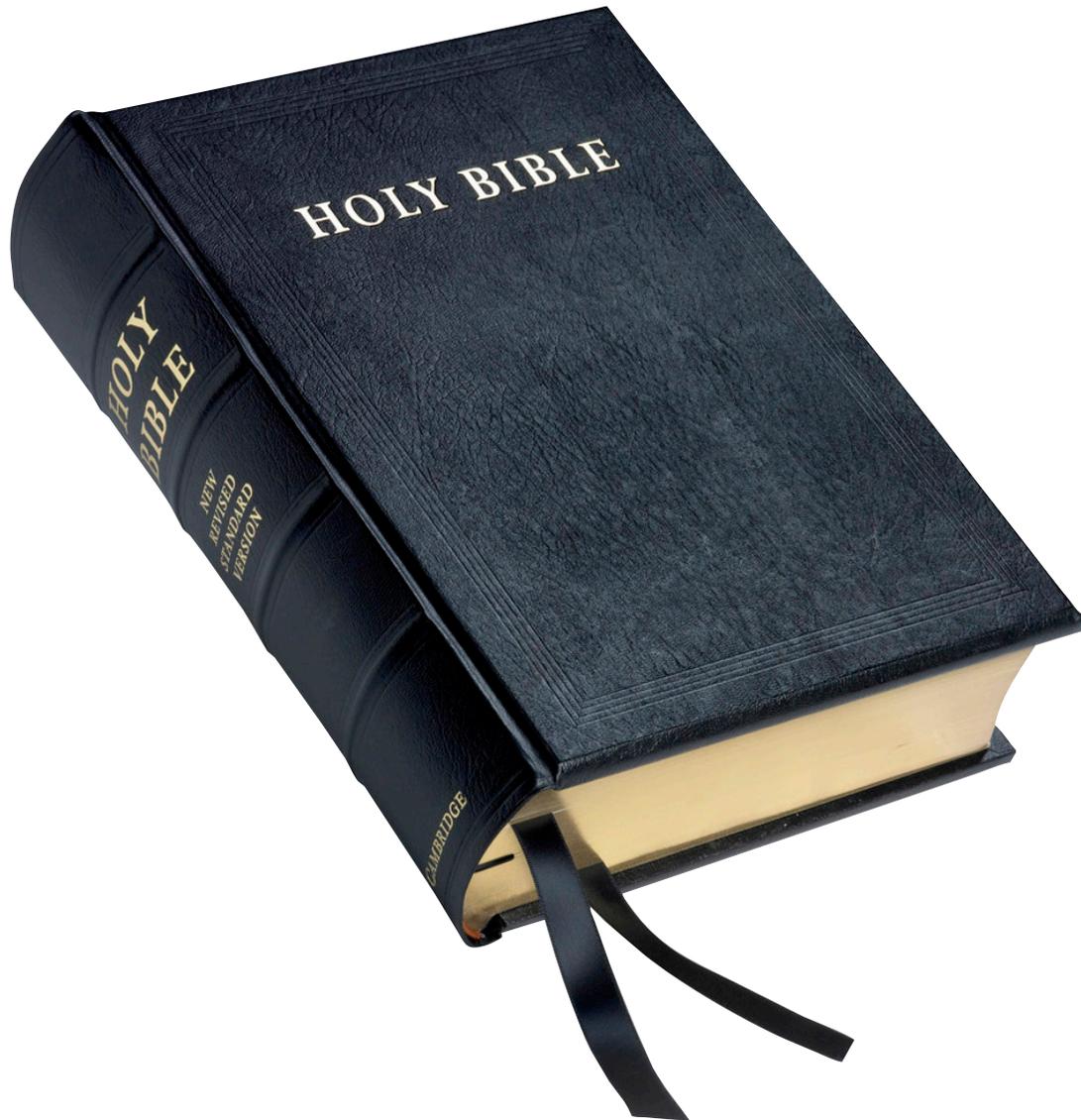


## Protest against Injustice in Christianity

Accordingly, a Christian may appeal to Moses' law, avenge himself and protest against injustice. This law provides: "Anyone who takes the life of a human being is to be put to death. Anyone who takes the life of someone's animal must make restitution—life for life.

Anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same manner: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The one who has inflicted the injury must suffer the same injury. Whoever kills an animal must make restitution, but whoever kills a human being is to be put to death." (Leviticus 24:17-21)

Therefore, supposing that Jesus actually made the statements first written above as cited in the New Testament, those statements should not be understood as abrogating the rulings of Moses' law. Rather, they just served as a call for moral development and



spiritual excellence. It was such a call to which not each Christian could respond, nor could it serve as a practical lifestyle given the fact that it was not put into practice anywhere or any time.

We have never heard of a Christian or another society which bound its members to tolerate enmity, hate, curse, mistreatment, and beating and allow the other to strip them of their clothes and property without any claim for recovery and to persecute them and refrain from resisting evil in general.

The following are statements offered as evidence for the fact that Jesus did not abrogate many of the rulings of Moses' law and that he just called for moral development and spiritual excellence:

"You have heard that it was said to those of old,



‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment.” (Matthew 5:21-22)

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.” (Matthew 5:27-29)

We may ask here: do the above verses mean that he who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment literally? Is he who looks at a woman lustfully deemed to have committed adultery with her and does he become liable to judgment literally? Is it permissible to gouge an eye out and throw it away instead of looking at a woman lustfully?



The answer is that it is the killer and the adulterer only who are liable to judgment. He who is angry with his brother should not be liable to judgment, nor should he who looks at a woman lustfully be deemed to have committed adultery with her or become liable to judgment. A person may in no way gouge his eye out or throw it away in accordance with all divine messages, including Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The reported statements of Jesus do not serve as legal injunctions or rulings but spiritual commandments and teachings.

Thus, the statements of Jesus quoted by Christians to indicate to which extent Christianity is tolerant do not constitute a Christian law but just moral and ethical commandments and teachings recommended by Jesus as well as other prophets including Prophet Muhammad.

## Protest against Injustice in Islam

In this sense, the message of Prophet Muhammad does not differ from that of Jesus. Islam has such a law that guarantees justice among Muslims and even between Muslim and non-Muslims. At the same time, Prophet Muhammad's Sunnah and the Qur'an had such teachings and commandments calling for moral development and spiritual excellence, like those of Jesus.

Like a Christian, a Muslim should be characterized by moral development, spiritual excellence and behavioral civilization when dealing with the other as far as possible. However, he can still appeal to the Islamic law if he can show no more toleration and then seeks justice, equity and redress.

The Qur'an stated that the Torah provided for retaliation. We read:

Indeed, We sent down the Torah, in which was guidance and light...And We ordained for them therein a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and for wounds is legal

retribution. But whoever gives [up his right as] charity, it is an expiation for him...And We sent, following in their footsteps, Jesus, the son of Mary, confirming that which came before him in the Torah; and We gave him the Gospel, in which was guidance and light and confirming that which preceded it of the Torah as guidance and instruction for the righteous. (Al-Ma'idah 5:44-46)

About retaliation in Islam, the Qur'an says:

O you who have believed, prescribed for you is legal retribution for those murdered – the free for the free, the slave for the slave, and the female for the female. But whoever overlooks from his brother anything, then there should be a suitable follow-up and payment to him with good conduct. This is an alleviation from your Lord and a mercy. But whoever transgresses after that will have a painful punishment. And there is for you in legal retribution [saving of] life, O you [people] of understanding, that you may become righteous. (Al-Baqarah 2:178-179)

## Tolerance in Islam

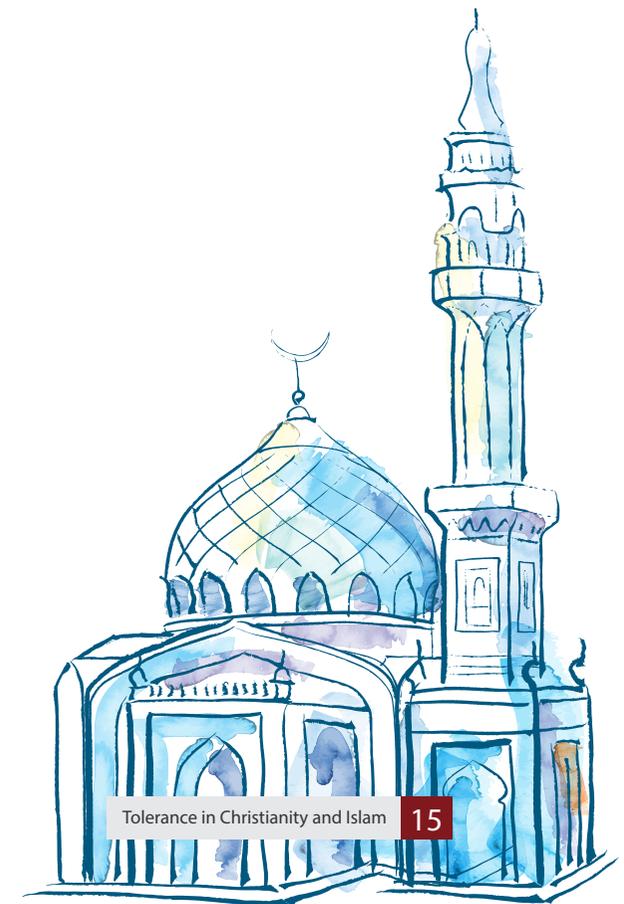
As for the teachings and commandments related to good manners, high morals, and lofty ethics, they are frequently enjoined in the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad's Sunnah.

For example, the Qur'an orders doing good to enemies. We read:

And not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better; and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend. (Fussilat 41:34)

Prophet Muhammad prohibited hate and hatred. He said: "Do not boycott each other, do not contrive against each other, do not hate each other, and do not be envious of one another. Be all of you brothers to one another, O servants of God. It is not lawful for a Muslim to avoid speaking with his brother beyond three days." (Al-Bukhari)

Moreover, Prophet Muhammad prohibited cursing and even angry reaction to cursing. Abu Huraira reported that a man reviled Abu Bakr while Prophet Muhammad was sitting down and he was impressed by Abu Bakr and smiled. When the man kept reviling Abu Bakr, he reviled the man with the same words as him. Then, Prophet Muhammad became angry and stood to leave. Abu Bakr went to Prophet Muhammad and said, "O Messenger of God, the man reviled me and you were sitting, but when I responded, you became angry and stood up." Then, Prophet Muhammad said, "Verily, there was an angel with you responding on your behalf, but Satan appeared when you responded with the same words as him and I would not sit in the presence of Sa-





tan." Then Prophet Muhammad said, "O Abu Bakr, there are three things which are right all. No servant is wronged by an oppressor and he overlooks it except that God, the Exalted, will support him. A man does not open the door of charity to strengthen family ties except that God will increase his wealth. A man does not open the door for begging to usurp wealth except that God will increase his poverty." (Ahmad)

The Qur'an commanded doing good even to those who do evil to us. We read:

Repel, by [means of] what is best, [their] evil. We are most knowing of what they describe. (Al-Mu'minun 23:96)

The Qur'an usually praises those who keep patient and do good to those who do evil to them. We read:

And those who are patient, seeking the

countenance of their Lord, and establish prayer and spend from what We have provided for them secretly and publicly and prevent evil with good – those will have the good consequence of [this] home. (Ar-Ra'd 13:22)

We also read:

Those will be given their reward twice for what they patiently endured and [because] they avert evil through good, and from what We have provided them they spend. And when they hear ill speech, they turn away from it and say, 'For us are our deeds, and for you are your deeds. Peace will be upon you; we seek not the ignorant.' (Al-Qasas 28:54-55)

The Qur'an orders helping those who ask for help. We read:

But [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes in Allah, the Last Day, the an-



gels, the Book, and the prophets and gives wealth, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveler, those who ask [for help.] (Al-Baqarah 2:177)

The Qur'an frequently praises those who succor the needy and promises them great reward. We read:

Indeed, the righteous will be among gardens and springs, accepting what their Lord has given them. Indeed, they were before that doers of good. They used to sleep but little of the night, And in the hours before dawn they would ask forgiveness, And from their properties was [given] the right of the [needy] beggars and the deprived. (Adh-Dhariyat 51:15-19)

The Qur'an prohibited repelling the beggar. We read:

And as for the beggar, do not repel [him]. (Ad-Duha 93:10)

Prophet Muhammad urged lending the needy, alleviating their hardships and making it easy for the indebted to repay their debts. He said: "If anyone relieves a Muslim believer from one of the hardships of this worldly life, Allah will relieve him of one of the hardships of the Day of



Resurrection. If anyone makes it easy for the one who is indebted to him (while finding it difficult to repay), Allah will make it easy for him in this worldly life and in the Hereafter, and if anyone conceals the faults of a Muslim, Allah will conceal his faults in this world and in the Hereafter. Allah helps His slave as long as he helps his brother.” (Muslim)

The Qur’an prohibited usury and urged giving more time to the indebted to repay their debts, keeping patient with them and giving them charity by canceling their debts. We read:

O you who have believed, fear Allah and give up what remains [due to you] of interest, if you should be believers. And if you do not, then be informed of a war [against you] from Allah and His Messenger. But if you repent, you may have your principal – [thus] you do no wrong, nor are you wronged. And if someone is in hardship, then [let there be] postponement until [a time of] ease. But if you give [from your right as] charity, then it is better for you, if you only knew. (Al-Baqarah 2:278-280)

# Tolerance towards the Followers of the Other Faiths

## Jesus' Tolerance

Many people claim that Christianity has been more tolerant than Islam when preaching to and dealing with the followers of other faiths in general and that Jesus was more tolerant than Prophet Muhammad.

Those people support their allegation with the following and similar statements attributed to Jesus in the New Testament:

“And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the Day of Judgment, than for that city.” (Mark 6:11)

They argue that Jesus did not confront disbelief in him and his message with the logic of power and violence as Islam and Prophet Muhammad did.

## Discussion of Jesus' Tolerance

However, we may ask: was Jesus' message purely peaceful and totally free from jihad (struggle)? The answer to this question may be deduced from the following statements of Jesus himself:

“But those enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and kill them in front of me” (Luke 19:27)

“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.” (Matthew 10:34-36)

“I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you,



but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law." (Luke 12:49-53)

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." (John 2:13-17)

"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds." (2 John 9-11)

## Jesus' Inability to Fight against Injustice

The above verses indicate that the intention of jihad was cherished by Jesus simply because each cause needs forces to protect and defend it. But, was Jesus capable of jihad as Prophet Muhammad was?

The answer is “no,” for Jesus lived under direct rule by the pagan Roman Empire and he had not such followers who could support, protect or defend him. Jesus foreknew that his disciples would disown, fail, let him down and even deliver him to his enemy. The New Testament quotes Jesus as saying:

“This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’ But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.” Peter replied, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will.” “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.” But Peter declared, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.” And all the other disciples said the same. (Matthew 26:31-35)

Therefore, Jesus could not engage into jihad to support his cause. He could only call to God quite peacefully.

He did not think for even a moment to struggle against the then authority. According to the New Testament, he called for submission, surrender and obedience to this authority though it was pagan and did not believe in God as the Deity or in him as a prophet and messenger or even as a teacher and messiah.

We read: So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so that they could deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor. They questioned Him, saying, “Teacher, we know that You speak and teach correctly, and You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” But He detected their trickery and said to them, “Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?” They said, “Caesar’s.” And He said to them, “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” (Luke 20:20-25)

We also read: “Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.” (1 Peter 2:17)



مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ

## Prophet Muhammad and Fight against Injustice

Insofar as Prophet Muhammad is concerned, besides his peaceful preaching, he was ordered to prepare as much armed forces as possible to defend himself and his cause. In this regard, God says in the Qur'an:

And prepare against them whatever you are able of power and of steeds of war by which you may terrify the enemy of God and your enemy and others besides them whom you do not know [but] whom God knows. (Al-Anfal 8:60)

Not only was Prophet Muhammad ordered to engage in jihad to de-

fend himself and his mission, but also he was ordered to encourage the believers to engage into jihad with him. In the Qur'an, God says:

So fight, [O Muhammad], in the cause of God; you are not held responsible except for yourself. And encourage the believers [to join you] that perhaps God will restrain the [military] might of those who disbelieve. And God is greater in might and stronger in [exemplary] punishment. (An-Nisaa' 4:84)

God also says:

O Prophet, urge the believers to battle. If there are among you twenty [who are] steadfast, they will overcome two hundred. And if there are among you one hundred

[who are] steadfast, they will overcome a thousand of those who have disbelieved because they are a people who do not understand. (Al-Anfal 8:65)

Unlike the disciples who failed Jesus, the Companions responded to, defended and ransomed Prophet Muhammad with their souls and property. About that, God says in the Qur'an:

Those [believers] who responded to God and the Messenger after injury had struck them. For those who did good among them and feared God is a great reward – Those to whom hypocrites said, "Indeed, the people have gathered against you, so fear them." But it [merely] increased them in faith, and they said, "Sufficient for us is God, and [He is] the best Disposer of affairs." So they returned with favor from God and bounty, no harm having touched them. And they pursued the pleasure of God, and God is the possessor of great bounty. That is only Satan who frightens [you] of his supporters. So fear them not, but fear Me, if you are [indeed] believers. (Aal `Imran 3:172-175)

Thus, God supported Prophet Muhammad with such faithful followers who protected and defended him. In the Qur'an, God says:

O Prophet, sufficient for you is God and for whoever follows you of the believers. (Al-Anfal 8:64)

He also says:

But if they intend to deceive you – then sufficient for you is God. It is He who supported you with His help and with the believers (Al-Anfal 8:62)

Therefore, the Qur'an often praises Prophet Muhammad's Companions and promises them great reward. For example, the Qur'an says:

But those who have believed and emigrated and fought in the cause of God and those who gave shelter and aided – it is they who are the believers, truly. For them is forgiveness and noble provision. (Al-Anfal 8:74)

## Tolerance despite the Ability to Fight against Injustice

In spite of Prophet Muhammad's empowerment on earth and support with large military forces from sincere, faithful believers, Prophet Muhammad remained tolerant even at war and towards his polytheistic enemy.

Prophet Muhammad was inclined to peace and would not go to war unless he had to. He was commanded to incline to peace whenever the enemy inclined to it.

And if they incline to peace, then incline to it [also] and rely upon God. Indeed, it is He who is the Hearing, the Knowing. (Al-Anfal 8:61)

Prophet Muhammad used to give captives good treatment and then pardon and release them by virtue by a commandment from God. God says:

O Prophet, say to whoever is in your hands of the cap-

tives, "If God knows [any] good in your hearts, He will give you [something] better than what was taken from you, and He will forgive you; and God is Forgiving and Merciful." (Al-Anfal 8:70)

He also says:

Say to those who have disbelieved [that] if they cease, what has previously occurred will be forgiven for them. But if they return [to hostility], then the precedent of the former [rebellious] peoples has already taken place. (Al-Anfal 8:38)

Finally, it is safe to say that Jesus did not have the opportunity to engage into jihad, nor did God enable him to establish a state for himself and his mission where the law of God could be enjoined. Therefore, only peaceful preaching was available to him.

When it comes to tolerance, it is a big mistake to draw a comparison between Jesus and Prophet Muhammad or Jesus' message and Muhammad's though we believe in both, on an equal footing. God empowered and even commanded Prophet Muhammad to prepare for and even engage into jihad. Moreover, He supported him with faithful followers who defended and protected him.

Thus, Prophet Muhammad was capable of peaceful preaching like Jesus, and what is more he was supported with the necessary armed forces. So he could defend himself and his mission and establish a state where he could enjoin the law of God.

However, Prophet Muhammad always showed tolerance. But, it was the tolerance of the victorious conqueror that chose to be tolerant rather than the tolerance of the armless herald that was failed and had no choice but to be tolerant given the lack of support and protection.

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