

Christians and Jews in Qur'anic Perspective¹

Sheikh Dr. Mustafa Rashid²

Mr. Mazhar Mallouhi asked me to write an objective study about the corruption by Christians and Jews of the Bible (Torah, Psalms, and Gospel).

Beginning with God giving us the ability to succeed and guiding us, and striving for truth and his approval, asking for help from God's prophets and those he loves, we ask blessings and peace upon Moses peace be upon him, the one who spoke with God; and all love to the Word of God, Christ, to him be glory in the highest, and all peace and greetings on the prophet of Islam Muhammad son of Abdallah, and we also ask blessings and peace upon the other prophets of God and we do not distinguish between them. As for what follows...

In laying out our response to the charge of corruption, we will look into two important matters, first of all the verses that address the issue of corruption on the one hand, and the verses that address the status of the Holy Bible on the other.

1. The Verses that Address the Issue of Corruption

The Qur'anic verses related to the Bible, and which are cited by those claiming that the Bible is corrupted, are in God Almighty's words:

1. ﴿Can ye (o ye men of Faith) entertain the hope that they will believe in you?- Seeing that a party of them heard the Word of God, and perverted it knowingly after they understood it.﴾ Surah al-Baqara 2:75

Baghawi in his commentary says: ﴿a party of them heard the Word of God﴾ This means the Torah. ﴿and perverted it﴾ They changed the rulings in it.

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² Sheikh Dr. Mustafa Rashid is a scholar at Al-Azhar and president of the World Association of Islamic Scholars for Peace and Non-Violence, and president of the World Conscience Organization for Human Rights.

﴿after they understood it﴾. Ibn Abbas and Muqatil said: “It came down on the seventy whom Moses had chosen to meet with his Lord, and this being that when they returned – after having heard the word of God- to their people the people returned to their words, but the truthful among them did according to what they had heard, while a group of them said, “We heard God say at the end of his words, that if you are able to do this, then do so, and if you wish then do not do so.” So this is their corruption, and they know it is true.”³

2. ﴿Of the Jews there are those who displace words from their (right) places, and say: "We hear and we disobey"; and "Hear what is not Heard"; and "Ra'ina"; with a twist of their tongues and a slander to Faith. If only they had said: "What hear and we obey"; and "Do hear"; and "Do look at us"; it would have been better for them, and more proper; but God hath cursed them for their Unbelief; and but few of them will believe.﴾ Sura An-Nisa 4:46
3. ﴿There is among them a section who distort the Book with their tongues: (As they read) you would think it is a part of the Book, but it is no part of the Book; and they say, "That is from God," but it is not from God: It is they who tell a lie against God, and (well) they know it!﴾ Sura Al ‘Imran 3:78

Ibn Katheer says in his commentary these two things, and that which is similar: “The Almighty says about the Jews that there is a group among them who corrupt the words from their places and change the Word of God, and take away that which was intended, to delude the ignorant that it is like this in the Scriptures, ascribing these words to God while it is lying against God, while they themselves know that they have lied and slandered in all these things, therefore He said: ﴿It is they who tell a lie against God, and (well) they know it!﴾

And Mujahid, Ash-Sha’abi, Al-Hasan, Qatada, and Ar-Rabi’a bin Anas said: ﴿who distort the Book with their tongues﴾ They corrupt it. This is what Al-Bukhari narrated from Ibn Abbas: They corrupt the Scriptures and add things, and there is no creature who removes an expression from one of the Books of God, but they corrupted it: They interpret it differently from its correct

³ Harash, Tibah Publishing and Distribution House, 1417 A.H./1997 A.D., Vol. 1, p.113.

interpretation. Wahb bin Munabbih said: “The Torah and Gospel are as God sent them down without a letter of them being changed, but they go astray in corrupting and interpreting, and with books that they themselves wrote, ﴿and they say, "That is from God," but it is not from God﴾. But the Books of God are protected and cannot be changed.” This was narrated by Ibn Abi Hatem, for what Wahb meant was that which was in their hands, for certainly changes, corruptions, additions and deletions entered it. However the translation of these testimonies into Arabic has a major error, many additions and omissions, and shameless delusion. This comes from the one expressing it in Arabic, and many, in fact most of them, indeed all of them had a perverted understanding. But if he meant the Books of God which are books from Him, then these are protected as he said, with no insertions.

4. ﴿But because of their breach of their covenant, We cursed them, and made their hearts grow hard; they change the words from their (right) places and forget a good part of the message that was sent them, nor wilt thou cease to find them- barring a few - ever bent on (new) deceits: but forgive them, and overlook (their misdeeds): for Allah loveth those who are kind. From those, too, who call themselves Christians, We did take a covenant, but they forgot a good part of the message that was sent them: so we estranged them, with enmity and hatred between the one and the other, to the day of judgment. And soon will God show them what it is they have done.﴾ (Surah Al-Ma’ida 5:13-14)

Al-Baghawi says about these two verses: Qatada said, “They negated some meanings of it because they contradicted the prophets who came after Moses and killed the prophets of God and rejected his Book and lost his commandments. Ata said: We have driven them away from Our mercy. It is said that its meaning is: Their hearts are not sincere in faith, rather their faith is unblemished infidelity and hypocrisy. ﴿They change the words from their (right) places﴾ It is said: Their corruption by misinterpreting expressions and words.

In looking at these verses, regarding the meanings, intentions, language, and reasons for revelation being given, we find that the verses indicate those who change the words from their places – and the pronoun here refers to Jewish and Christian clergy and not books, and in fact refers to those who change the words

with their tongues with loose interpretation. The verses do not mean the text itself at all, whether the Gospel or the Torah, since they have the truth which was not mentioned (according to the words in these verses) by Jewish and Christian clergy. So this is what these verses intend.

To confirm the impossibility of corruption in the Torah and Gospel, we present several verses:

- a. God Almighty says: ﴿Rejected were the messengers before thee: with patience and constancy they bore their rejection and their wrongs, until Our aid did reach them: there is none that can alter the words (and decrees) of God. Already hast thou received some account of those messengers.﴾ Sura An'am 6:34 Ibn Katheer says in his commentary on this verse: "God's words, ﴿Rejected were the messengers before thee: with patience and constancy they bore their rejection and their wrongs, until Our aid did reach them﴾. This is to relax and encourage the Prophet regarding those of his people who rejected him, and He commanded him to be patient as those prophets of determination were patient, and God promised him victory just as they were victorious. He said: ﴿There is no changing the words of God﴾, in other words those he wrote in this world and the next for his believing worshippers just as he said, because the Word of God is protected from change and corruption." These words here are a universal rule which existence and movement are founded upon, which are His decisions and the commandments which are kept in a Preserved Tablet.⁴
- b. ﴿The word of thy Lord doth find its fulfilment in truth and in justice: None can change His words: for He is the one who heareth and knoweth all.﴾ Sura Al-An'am 6:115. There is a general tendency that ﴿The word of thy Lord﴾ here is all the words of God sent down in his Books. Then he adds: ﴿None can change His words﴾ Many people think that the meaning is "No one can change his commandments and his inspired words!" God Almighty also says: ﴿For them are glad tidings, in the life of the present and in the Hereafter; no change can

⁴ Ibn Katheer, *Tafseer al-Qur'an al-Atheem*, edited by Muhammad Husayn Shams Ed-Din, Al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya Publishing House, Beirut, Lebanon, 1419 A.H., volume 3, p.225.

there be in the words of Allah. This is indeed the supreme felicity.﴾
Sura Younis 10:64.

- c. God Almighty also says: ﴿We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it﴾ Sura Al-Hijr 15:9. Some extremists ask God for victory over the people of the Torah and Gospel in that the Qur'an was miraculously kept sound just as it was revealed to (the illiterate prophet), exalting themselves over them and accusing them of corrupting the Torah and Gospel, while they have correctly transmitted the Qur'an, keeping it safely, the evidence of which is God's words: ﴿We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it﴾. They say: This prophecy relates to the preservation of the Qur'an, and the line of transmitting it soundly from the Prophet is a miracle which confirms this prophecy. The question here is: Does the expression "Message" (*al-dhikr*) in the Qur'an only refer to the Qur'an? Is what is meant by verse 9 of Sura al-Hijr ﴿We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it﴾ the Qur'an? Did God in guaranteeing to protect his Word mean the Qur'an apart from other words and books like the Gospel and Torah? We do not deny that the expression *al-dhikr* is applied to the Qur'an in more than one chapter and verse, as in God's saying: ﴿They say: "O thou to whom the Message is being revealed! Truly thou art mad!﴾ Sura al-Hijr 15:6.

But we know that the Qur'an has also used the expression *al-dhikr* for the Gospel and Torah, and because of this we say that this expression is not restricted to the Qur'an only. Rather, it is a synonym for "the Book" *al-kitab*, just as *ahl al-dhikr* is a synonym for *ahl al-kitab* (People of the Book). *Al-dhikr* in the language of the Qur'an is a synonym for *al-kitab*. Strictly speaking, it is specifically connected with the Torah, as in God's words: ﴿Before this We wrote in the Psalms, after the Message: My servants the righteous, shall inherit the earth.﴾ Sura al-Anbiya 21:105. It is also connected with the Gospel as in God's words: ﴿This is what we rehearse unto thee of the Signs and the Message of Wisdom.﴾ Sura Al 'Imran 3:58. And the speech in this verse in Al 'Imran is addressed to Jesus the Messiah.

So the wise *dhikr*, contrary to what is presumed by common people, is a synonym for the Holy Bible, that is, the Torah and Gospel, which is clear when the Qur'an calls the People of the Book *ahl al-dhikr*: ﴿So ask the People of the Message if you do not know﴾ Sura al-Anbiya 21:7. *Al-dhikr* in an absolute sense is what the People of the Book (or *ahl al-dhikr*) have. And *al-dhikr* that came down on Muhammad is none other than an elaboration of the wise *dhikr*, just as the Qur'an is ﴿an elaboration of the Book﴾ Surah Younis 10:37.

- d. Al-Baghawi says in his commentary on the Word of God, Mighty and Glorious: ﴿And recite what has been revealed to thee of the Book of thy Lord: none can change His Words, and none wilt thou find as a refuge other than Him﴾ Sura al-Kahf 18:27. "What has been revealed to thee of the Book of thy Lord" means the Qur'an, and follow what is in it "none can change his Words", and Kalbi said: "none can change the Qur'an". It is said: None can change what he threatened with his words to the people of disobedience, that is, none can change the regulations. It is also said: None can change God's Words in the Qur'an, the Gospel, the Torah and all his revealed Words. Because these verses are clear without vagueness, in that they affirm that it is impossible to corrupt the Words of God without any exception at all, therefore it is said about these texts that they are definitive proof, because of their clarity, for they do not allow interpretation or ambiguity, in other words that it is impossible for humans to change the Words of God, and whoever says something contrary to this by calling the People of the Book unbelievers is himself an unbeliever by rejecting a fact of religion which is the case through definitive proof. But he can say that they are unbelievers in Islam and not accuse them of unbelief in a general sense.

2. The Status of the Holy Bible in the Qur'an

- a. Just as there are many verses in the Qur'an that glorify the Gospel and Torah, such as God's Words in Surah Al 'Imran 3:3 ﴿He has sent down upon you the Book in truth, confirming what was before it. And He revealed the Torah and the Gospel﴾. Al-Qurtubi says in his commentary regarding this verse: "He has sent down upon you the

Book” means the Qur’an in truth, that is in truthfulness, and it is said: with profound proof. The Qur’an was sent down intermittently. Therefore he said “sent down” and sending down time and again. The Torah and Gospel came down at one time, therefore he said “sent down”. And confirmation as in the case of affirming and not simply passing something on, because it is not possible for it to not confirm, that is not agreeing, which is generally agreed upon. Some see this as communicating the sense that it confirms itself as well as confirming other than itself.

- b. God Almighty also says: ﴿And God will teach him the Book and Wisdom, the Law and the Gospel﴾ Surah Al ‘Imran 3:48.
- c. The Almighty also says: ﴿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﴾ Surah al-Maida 5:43.
- d. God Almighty also says: ﴿It was We who revealed the Torah: therein was guidance and light. By its standard have been judged the Jews, by the prophets who submitted, by the rabbis and the doctors of law: for to them was entrusted the protection of Allah's book, and they were witnesses thereto: therefore fear not men, but fear me, and sell not my signs for a miserable price. If any do fail to judge by what Allah hath revealed, they are (no better than) Unbelievers﴾ Surah al-Maida 5:44. Al-Qurtubi says in his commentary on this verse: All who were sent after Moses to uphold the Torah and faith in it, and the Jews said: The prophets were Jews. The Christians said: They were Christians, and all of them believed in the Torah from Moses until the time of Jesus, peace be upon both of them. They judged according to what is in the Torah, and it is said: the meaning of “they submitted” is that they yielded and were led to God’s command in what they were sent with. And it is said: that is, that the prophets who followed the religion of Abraham (peace be upon him) judged according to it, which is the same meaning. And “those who submitted” here is a description with a meaning of approbation. That is, “we revealed the Torah in which is guidance and light” for those who became Jews “and the prophets

judged by it and the rabbis and the doctors of the law,” that is, the rabbis judged by it, and they are those who rule the people with knowledge and have authority over them. Abu Razin said: The rabbis are the wise scholars and the doctors of the law. Ibn Abbas said: They are the scholars of the law. And a doctor of the law is a learned man and he is engrossed in writing, which is embellishment. They record knowledge, that is, they clarify it and beautify it, and it is inscribed in their hearts. Mujahed said: The rabbis are above the scholars, and the alif and lam are for exaggeration.

- e. God Almighty also says: ﴿And in their footsteps We sent Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him. We sent him the Gospel, therein was guidance and light, and confirmation of the Law that had come before him, a guidance and an admonition to those who fear God﴾ Surah Al-Ma’ida 5:46. Ibn Katheer says in interpreting this verse, the words ﴿And in their footsteps﴾ which is “we followed up (in their steps)” which means, the prophets of the Sons of Israel [peace be upon them] ﴿Jesus the son of Mary, confirming the Law that had come before him﴾ that is, believing in it and judging according to what is in it, ﴿We sent him the Gospel, therein was guidance and light﴾ that is, guidance to the truth, and light by which he was enlightened to remove specious arguments and to resolve problems for all people. ﴿and confirmation of the Law that had come before him﴾ that is, following it, not violating that which is in it, except in a little found among the Sons of Israel and some things they differed over, just as God Almighty informed about the Messiah and how he said to the Sons of Israel: ﴿and to make lawful for you some of what was forbidden to you﴾ Surah Al ‘Imran 3:50. Therefore it is an established saying among the scholars that the Gospel abrogated some of the rules of the Torah. God’s words: ﴿a guidance and an admonition to those who fear God﴾, that is, We made the Gospel guidance by which people are guided, and ﴿an admonition﴾, that is, an obstacle to commit that which is forbidden and sinful ﴿to those who fear God﴾, that is, for those who feared God and feared his threat and punishment.

- f. And the Almighty's words: ﴿Let the people of the Gospel judge by what God hath revealed therein. If any do fail to judge by (the light of) what God hath revealed, they are (no better than) those who rebel﴾ Surah al-Ma'ida 5:47. This verse clearly exalts the Gospel and God's call to them to judge by what is in it, and whoever denies or rejects this are those who rebel. Ibn Katheer says in his commentary on this verse: ﴿Let the people of the Gospel judge by what God hath revealed therein﴾, the words "let them...judge" are to be read with the letter *lam* in the accusative, that is, "and we gave the Gospel... ﴿in which is guidance and light﴾ so that the people of its community might judge by it in their time."
- g. And God's Words: ﴿And if only they upheld the Torah, the Gospel, and what has been revealed to them from their Lord, they would have consumed [provision] from above them and from beneath their feet. Among them are a moderate community, but many of them - evil is that which they do﴾ (Surah al-Ma'ida 5:66).
- h. And God Almighty says: ﴿Say: "O People of the Book! You have no ground to stand upon unless you uphold the Torah, the Gospel, and all the revelation that has come to you from your Lord." It is the revelation that cometh to thee from thy Lord, that increaseth in most of them their obstinate rebellion and blasphemy. But sorrow thou not over (these) people without Faith﴾ (Surah al-Ma'ida 5:68). This is an indication that the faith of Christians and Jews is based on exalting and upholding the Torah and Gospel – and Ibn Katheer says that God Almighty says: Say, Muhammad, ﴿Say: "O People of the Book! You have no ground to stand upon﴾ that is, regarding religion ﴿unless you uphold the Torah and the Gospel﴾, that is, until you believe in all you possess of books sent down from God to the prophets.
- i. And in Surah al-Ma'ida, ﴿Then will God say: "O Jesus the son of Mary! Recount My favour to thee and to thy mother. Behold! I strengthened thee with the Holy Spirit, so that thou didst speak to the people in childhood and in maturity. Behold! I taught thee the Book and Wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel and behold! thou makest out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, by My leave, and thou breathest into it and it becometh a bird by My leave, and thou healest

those born blind, and the lepers, by My leave. And behold! thou bringest forth the dead by My leave. And behold! I did restrain the Children of Israel from (violence to) thee when thou didst show them the clear Signs, and the unbelievers among them said: 'This is nothing but evident magic.'» (Surah al-Ma'ida 5:110). Ibn Katheer says in his commentary on this verse, that God Almighty mentions what he bestowed upon his servant and messenger Jesus the son of Mary (his peace be upon us), the miracles and supernatural deeds he caused to take place through him.

Concerning the second part of this topic, which is, is it right for us to call a Christian or Jew a polytheist or unbeliever? We respond that it is unbelief to call Christians and Jews polytheists or unbelievers even if some of them act in polytheism or unbelief, and this is after God has described them as People of the Book.

- j. God Almighty says: «And there are, certainly, among the People of the Book, those who believe in God, in the revelation to you, and in the revelation to them, bowing in humility to God: They will not sell the Signs of God for a miserable gain! For them is a reward with their Lord, and God is swift in account» (Surah Al 'Imran 3:199).

We also find in Surah an-Nisa verse 123 «Not your desires, nor those of the People of the Book (can prevail): whoever works evil, will be requited accordingly. Nor will he find, besides God, any protector or helper», and in verse 131 «To God belong all things in the heavens and on earth. Verily we have directed the People of the Book before you, and you (o Muslims) to fear God. But if ye deny Him, lo! unto God belong all things in the heavens and on earth, and God is free of all wants, worthy of all praise».

And in Surah al-Ma'ida: «This day [all] good foods have been made lawful, and the food of those who were given the Scripture is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them. And [lawful in marriage are] chaste women from among the believers and chaste women from among those who were given the Scripture before you, when you have given them their due compensation, desiring chastity, not unlawful sexual intercourse or taking [secret] lovers. And whoever denies the faith - his work has become worthless, and he, in the Hereafter, will

be among the losers﴾ (Al-Ma'ida 5:5), and also in Surah al-Ma'ida: ﴿Say: "O People of the Book! You have no ground to stand upon unless you uphold the Torah, the Gospel, and all the revelation that has come to you from your Lord." It is the revelation that cometh to thee from thy Lord, that increaseth in most of them their obstinate rebellion and blasphemy. But sorrow thou not over (these) people without Faith﴾ (Surah al-Ma'ida 5:68).

And in Surah al-An'am: ﴿Moreover, We gave Moses the Book, completing (Our favour) to those who would do right, and explaining all things in detail,- and a guide and a mercy, that they might believe in the meeting with their Lord﴾ (Al-An'am 6:154).

And in Surah Yunis: ﴿So if you are in doubt, [O Muhammad], about that which We have revealed to you, then ask those who have been reading the Scripture before you. The truth has certainly come to you from your Lord, so never be among the doubters﴾ (Yunis 10:94).

And in Surah Hud: ﴿Can they be (like) those who accept a Clear (Sign) from their Lord, and whom a witness from Himself doth teach, as did the Book of Moses before it,- a guide and a mercy? They believe therein; but those of the Sects that reject it,- the Fire will be their promised meeting-place. Be not then in doubt thereon: for it is the truth from thy Lord: yet many among men do not believe!﴾ (Hud 11:17).

And in Surah al-Isra': ﴿We gave Moses the Book, and made it a Guide to the Children of Israel, (commanding): "Take not other than Me as Disposer of (your) affairs." ﴾ (al-Isra' 17:2).

And in Surah al-'Ankabut: ﴿And do not argue with the People of the Scripture except in a way that is best, except for those who commit injustice among them, and say: We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you. And our God and your God is one; and we are Muslims [in submission] to Him﴾ (Al-'Ankabut 29:46).

And in Surah al-Sajdah: ﴿And We certainly gave Moses the Scripture, so do not be in doubt over his meeting. And we made the Torah guidance for the Children of Israel﴾ (Al-Sajdah 32:23).

And in Surah al-Jathiyah: ﴿We did aforetime grant to the Children of Israel the Book the Power of Command, and Prophethood; We gave

them, for Sustenance, things good and pure; and We favoured them above the nations﴾ (Al-Jathiyah 45:16).

And in Surah al-Hadid: ﴿That the People of the Book may know that they have no power whatever over the Grace of God, that Grace is in His Hand, to bestow it on whomsoever He wills. For God is the possessor of Grace abounding﴾ (Al-Hadid 57:29).

This and tens of verses besides that speak of how the Jews and Christians are People of the Book and are different from polytheists and unbelievers, and those of them who disbelieve or become polytheists join the ranks of the disbelievers and polytheists, but are still People of the Book, just as God has described them, and whoever says something to the contrary has necessarily disbelieved in a fact of religion.

Therefore we should not listen to the ignorant, who accuse God of lying and lead people astray wrongly and falsely. There is a great difference between the People of the Book and disbelievers and polytheists, may God protect us from this polytheism and great offense.

And may God support our purpose and desire—He is the one we seek help from.