

IS MUHAMMAD WORSHIPPED IN ISLAM?

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Muslims take great pride in their belief that they are the ONLY true monotheistic religion. That Allah alone is god, and that they worship none but Allah. A Muslim will very quickly point out to you that the Quran never uses the word worship in relation to Muhammad. The beliefs of the faith, the statements in its revered works, and the actions of its followers seem to indicate a different story.

The Shahadah

The most obvious contradiction to the "Allah only" belief of Islam is in the Islamic statement of faith or Shahada. The Shahada is the creed of Islam. It says:

"I testify there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah."

The Shahada is one of the five pillars of Islam. Every Muslim must say this statement in Arabic sincerely in order to be considered a true Muslim. The Shahada must be honored until death, and denial of it nullifies any hope of entering Janna or paradise.

The conflict comes in that the statement of faith requires not only belief in Allah, but also belief in Muhammad as his prophet. These two phrases seem to indicate a system of "Allah plus Muhammad" equals true belief. Monotheism by definition is a singular belief in a singular god, but this statement of faith shows the need for multiple objects of belief.

The Quran's teaching about Muhammad

While the Shahadah alone doesn't definitively show that Islam encourages the worship of Allah, there are many verses in the Quran that can be, and have been, interpreted in a way that clearly shows a tendency towards worship of the prophet. Consider these three verses to begin.

Ye have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the Praise of Allah. (Quran 33:21)

But those who disobey Allah and His Messenger and transgress His limits will be admitted to a Fire, to abide therein: And they shall have a humiliating punishment. (Quran 4:14)

"In order that ye (O men) may believe in Allah and His Messenger, that ye may assist and honour Him, and celebrate His praise morning and evening." Quran 48:9

It is clear from these Quran verses that the path to obedience comes through following the "beautiful pattern" of Muhammad. Disobedience to Allah AND his messenger leads to "humiliating punishment."

So how far must a Muslim go in honoring Muhammad? This verse indicates clearly that love for Allah AND his prophet should surpass the love one has for his own family.

Say: If it be that your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your mates, or your kindred; the wealth that ye have gained; the commerce in which ye fear a decline: or the dwellings in which ye delight - are dearer to you than Allah, or His Messenger, or the striving in His cause;- then wait until Allah brings about His decision: and Allah guides not the rebellious. Quran 9:24

In one Quran verse Muhammad uses phrasing similar to Jesus to explain the relationship of faith and belief in Allah and himself:

"Say: "If ye do love Allah, Follow me: Allah will love you and forgive you your sins: For Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." Quran 3:31

Jesus of course says in John 14:6 "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." And Jesus has every right to say this because he is indeed God. Muhammad on the other hand was claiming to be a prophet of Allah, not Allah himself. According to Muslims who say they do not worship Muhammad, there should be no requirement to follow Muhammad in order to love Allah. It is an unusual contradiction to reconcile.

The Quran goes on to say:

"He who obeys the Messenger, obeys Allah: But if any turn away, We have not sent thee to watch over their (evil deeds)." Quran 4:80

This is a strong statement. It seems to the casual reader to indicate that obedience to Muhammad is equivalent to obedience to Allah. This seems to put Allah and Muhammad on equal footing.

So while the Quran never explicitly teaches that Muslim's should worship Muhammad it clearly teaches that faith in Allah is intricately tied to belief in, and obedience to Muhammad.

The Hadith's teaching about Muhammad

the Quran is not the only revered teaching in Islam. The Hadith provide thousands of teachings and sayings of the prophet Muhammad to which Muslims must look for rules for living the life acceptable to Allah. We will look at just a few Hadith here to show what Muhammad himself thought of his revered position in relationship to Allah and how others interpreted it.

"Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) said: I shall be pre-eminent amongst the descendants of Adam on the Day of Resurrection and I will be the first intercessor and the first whose intercession will be accepted (by Allah)." Hadith Muslim 1065

Muhammad, while not claiming equality with Allah, clearly sees himself as the most important person ever and his intercessions will carry more weight with Allah than anyone else's.

"The Prophet said, 'Whoever possesses the following three qualities will have the sweetness (delight) of faith:

- The one to whom Allah and His Apostle becomes dearer than anything else.
- Who loves a person and he loves him only for Allah's sake.
- Who hates to revert to Atheism (disbelief) as he hates to be thrown into the fire." Hadith Bukhari 1:15"

The Hadith above reflects clearly the same teachings of Quran 9:24, that placing Allah AND Muhammad above all else gives one special standing with Allah.

Let's look at one more Hadith to see how Muhammad's own first generation followers viewed the status of the prophet in relation to the rest of the world.

"I said to 'Abida, "I have some of the hair of the Prophet which I got from Anas or from his family." 'Abida replied, "No doubt if I had a single hair of that it would have been dearer to me than the whole world and whatever is in it."" Hadith Bukhari 1:171

Another strong statement placing Muhammad in a different category than a normal "prophet." One follower envies the other that he has "some of the hair" of Muhammad. He admits that the hair of the prophet is dearer than everything in the world.

How do we respond to this as Christians? On the one hand Islam tells us it only worships Allah and that our belief in a triune God is blasphemy. On the other hand Islam in practice worships both Allah and Muhammad. The Bible never teaches that disobeying a prophet will lead to damnation, nor does obedience to a prophet lead to heavenly reward. Our hope and faith lies in the Triune God alone, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.