

Need for Interfaith Unity

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In today's world many atrocities, murders, and crimes are committed in the name of God and religion. Some believe they are the only righteous ones and everyone else is an infidel. Some so-called religious leaders call the prophet of God a "terrorist". This division and self-prophecy by people or groups of people have been ongoing throughout the times. Dictators, corrupt political and religious leaders have embraced such divisions and conflicts to expand their control and power and to increasingly tyrannize and oppress people in an unprecedented manner.

The true purpose of religion is as follows:

"To build a world in which Justice and Fairness applies to everyone; everyone's rights are protected; there is no sign of injustice, oppression, corruption, poverty, ignorance, indignity, hatred, extremism, racism, prejudice, and war; and humankind can live in happiness, contentment, and fulfillment with kindness and peace of mind."

To achieve this goal and build such a world God, through the prophets and the holy scriptures, has provided the necessary guidance. Study of the holy scriptures and commandments reveal that to reach this goal it is necessary that people unite, stand for, and uphold justice. By doing so the human being has a chance to create the world that humankind deserves.

All religious, righteous, reformers, and majority of non-religious people share this goal, and they all wish to live in such a world. People of the world who share this goal should join hands and unite with each other in order to achieve this invaluable goal by utilizing their combined resources. Only being concerned about one's own integrity is not enough. Everyone should unite and actively participate to stop oppressors and corrupts from crushing people's rights, committing crimes and atrocities, and creating fear, anxiety, hatred, misery, and anger.

So, what has prevented such a world from becoming a reality? Why are there so many wars? Why are so many atrocities, murders, and crimes being committed? Why does the name calling and demonizing each other still continue? Why do hatred, oppression, extremism, fanaticism, and betrayal thrive in this world? Why are injustice, poverty, and corruption on the rise?

The answer is, dictators, corrupt politicians and religious leaders do anything to expand and increase their power, authority, control, and wealth. They do their utmost, so everyone obeys them without any question. They have used the "divide and conquer" tactic for centuries to prevent the unity of religious, righteous, and reformers. They have encouraged extremism, so people stop listening to each other. They have promoted differences among various groups, and have encouraged every group to believe that they are the only ones that are right and all others are wrong.

Every group believes that because they practice their rituals and the details of their faith in a different way, they are the only righteous ones. They have stopped listening to each other, and do not realize they all have the same goal. This division has allowed dictators, corrupt politicians, and so-called religious leaders to prevent everyone from accomplishing this invaluable objective by promoting division, extremism, and injustice.

These divisions, conflicts, and disputes have existed and continue to escalate and intensify in spite the fact that God has established the same religion for Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, and all other prophets, and has commanded everyone to make no division.

It is time to put the differences aside and unite and commit all resources to build a world that kindness, peace, justice, fairness, having peace of mind, contentment, and tolerance are the norm, and there is no sign of injustice, oppression, corruption, ignorance, poverty, indignity, hatred, extremism, prejudice, racism, and war. Whenever such a world becomes a reality, everyone can live in happiness with fulfillment and contentment, everyone practices their own rituals and details in conformity to their faith, and humankind will have achieved what all the prophets of God and the holy scriptures stand for. We must unite and put an end to injustice, hatred, extremism, and enmities.

Differences in details and rituals, misunderstanding each others' beliefs, and the refusal to listen to each others' points of view have resulted in a world full of hatred, injustice, and corruption. The only way to reach this invaluable goal of religion is by setting aside our differences and disagreements and concentrating on God's commandments that are the guiding light that will enlighten the path for unity of religious, righteous, and reformers.

What does Justice and Fairness truly mean? It means that everyone's rights should be observed, respected, and protected. These rights include the Right to Life, Financial Right, the Right to exercise Chastity, the Right to have Peace of Mind and the Right to have Dignity. Additionally, the Rights of Parents and Neighbors must also be observed.

The next section will review these rights in the scriptures and points out the fact that all the scriptures have protected these rights for all humankind.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to point out that one should study the scriptures and ponder upon their commandments. People should not simply believe what anyone claims about the scriptures. Therefore, look these verses up, and study and refer to the scriptures whenever someone quotes anything, and alleges that it is from the scriptures.

The Quran

Chapter 57, Verse 25: on Justice and Fairness:

"We have certainly sent Our messengers with clear evidences, and sent down the book and the balance (of right and wrong) with them so that people carry out justice."

Chapter 5, Verse 8: on Justice and Fairness:

"You who believe, be maintainers for God (and His commandments) and be witnesses with justice, and do not let the hatred of any group cause you not to be just, be just as it is closer to being cautious (of God)."

Chapter 4, Verse 135: on Justice and Fairness:

"You who believe, be maintainers of justice and witnesses for God even if it is against yourselves, parents, or relatives (and close ones) whether he is rich or poor. God has priority over them, so do not follow desires to deviate from justice."

Chapter 17, Verse 33 on the Right to Life:

"Do not kill anyone as God made it sacred (or forbidden), except in just cause (within the due process of law)."

Chapter 2, Verse 188 on Financial Rights:

“Do not eat up each others’ properties falsely among yourselves, and do not offer it (as bribe) to judges so that you eat up from a portion of people’s properties sinfully while you know it.”

Chapter 17, Verse 32 on the Right to Chastity:

“Do not go near adultery/fornication, indeed it is indecent and a bad way.”

Chapter 49, Verse 11-12 on the Right to have Peace of Mind:

“You who believe, people should not ridicule other people, as perhaps they may be better than them, and women should not (ridicule) other women, as perhaps they may be better than them, and do not criticize (and insult) each other, and do not call each other by (offensive) nicknames,... avoid most suspicions, as indeed some suspicions are sins, and do not snoop, and do not defame/backbite each other (or gossip).”

Chapter 4, Verse 36 on the Rights of Parents and Neighbors:

" And serve God and do not associate anything with Him (as partner), and be good to your parents, relatives (and close ones), orphans, the needy, relative/close neighbors, stranger/distant neighbors, companions by the side, traveler (in need), and those whom your right hands own.”

Chapter 42, Verse 13 on the Unity of Religion:

“He legislated for you the way of life (religion) that He instructed Noah to it, and what We revealed to you, and what We instructed Abraham and Moses and Jesus to it, to uphold the religion and do not become divided in it.”

To abide by these commands, true followers of the Quran (not those who blindly follow what is being told about the Quran) should unite and cooperate with others who have similar beliefs and values, i.e. with the religious, righteous and reformers of the world, in order to make a world in which there is no sign of injustice, oppression, and corruption.

The Bible (New Testament)

Matthew 5:20 Jesus says:

“I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 9:13 Jesus says:

“I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Matthew 13:43 Jesus says:

"Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

Matthew 23:23 Jesus says:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law, justice, mercy and faith. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.”

Matthew 25:46 Jesus says:

"And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

1 John 3:10 John writes:

"... whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God,"

Matthew 19:16 Jesus answers to a man's question:

A man came to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

Jesus replies:

"You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself."

Matthew 7:21 Jesus says:

"Not every one that says to me, Master, Master, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

1 Corinthians 5:11 Paul writes:

"But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is fornicator or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people."

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Paul writes:

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God."

By analyzing these verses from the Bible we realize that according to the sayings of Jesus, if a Christian, a Buddhist, a Zoroastrian, a Jew, a Muslim, or anyone else who carries out the commands of God (does not kill, nor commits adultery, nor steals, nor bears false witness, nor lies, honors his/her father and mother, and loves his/her neighbor) will enter the kingdom of heaven. A person calling himself/herself a follower of Jesus whose actions are contrary to the teachings of Jesus, will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Also in accordance with the teachings of the Bible, the followers of Jesus who are aware of these teachings (and not blindly following what is being told about the Bible) should unite and cooperate with others who have similar beliefs and values, i.e. with the religious, righteous and reformers of the world, in order to make a world in which there is no sign of injustice, oppression, and corruption.

The Bible (Old Testament)

In Exodus 20:12-17 the commandments are:

"Honor your father and your mother...

You shall not kill.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything else that belongs to your neighbor."

Deuteronomy, chapter 5:16-21 reiterates the same commands.

Leviticus 19:11, 13, 15

“Do not steal. Do not deceive or cheat one another... Do not defraud or rob your neighbor...Do not twist justice in legal matters by favoring the poor or being partial to the rich and powerful. Always judge people fairly.”

Genesis 18:19

“Keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just.”

Deuteronomy 16:19-20

“You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. Justice, and only justice, you shall follow.”

Jeremiah 22:3

“This is what the Lord says, “Be fair-minded and just. Do what is right! Help those who have been robbed; rescue them from their oppressors. Quit your evil deeds! Do not mistreat foreigners, orphans, and widows. Stop murdering the innocent!””

Isaiah 56:1

“Be just and fair to all. Do what is right and good,”

Exodus 23:1

“You must not pass along false rumors. You must not cooperate with evil people by lying on the witness stand.”

In accordance with the teachings of the Torah, the Jewish people who are aware of these commands (and not blindly following what is being told about the Torah) should unite and cooperate with others who have similar beliefs and values, i.e. with the religious, righteous and reformers of the world, in order to make a world in which there is no sign of injustice, oppression, and corruption.

Teachings of Buddha

In Sigalovada Sutta, The Buddha tells Sigalaka the followings:

"Inasmuch, young householder, as the noble disciple has eradicated the four vices in conduct, inasmuch as he commits no evil action in four ways, ..., he is favored in this world and in the world beyond. Upon the dissolution of the body, after death, he is born in a happy heavenly realm."

"What are the four vices in conduct that he has eradicated? The destruction of life, householder, is a vice and so are stealing, sexual misconduct, and lying. These are the four vices that he has eradicated."

... He spoke yet again:

“Killing, stealing, lying and adultery.
These four evils the wise never praise.”

"In which four ways does one commit no evil action? Led by desire does one commit evil. Led by anger does one commit evil. Led by ignorance does one commit evil. Led by fear does one commit evil."

"But inasmuch as the noble disciple is not led by desire, anger, ignorance, and fear, he commits no evil."

In “Avoiding Ten Evils” section, The Buddha says:

All acts of living creatures become bad by ten things, and by avoiding the ten things they become good. There are three evils of the body, four evils of the tongue, and three evils of the mind.

The evils of the body are murder, theft, and adultery; of the tongue are lying, slander, abuse, and idle talk; of the mind are covetousness, hatred, and error.

I exhort you to avoid the ten evils:

- 1 Kill not, but have regard for life.
- 2 Steal not, neither do ye rob; but help everybody to be master of the fruits of his labor.
- 3 Abstain from impurity, and lead a life of chastity.
- 4 Lie not, but be truthful. Speak the truth with discretion, fearlessly and in a loving heart.
- 5 Invent not evil reports, neither do ye repeat them. Carp not, but look for the good sides of your fellow beings, so that ye may with sincerity defend them against their enemies.
- 6 Swear not, but speak decently and with dignity.
- 7 Waste not the time with gossip, but speak to the purpose or keep silence.
- 8 Covet not, nor envy, but rejoice at the fortunes of other people.
- 9 Cleanse your heart of malice and cherish no hatred, not even against your enemies; but embrace all living beings with kindness.
- 10 Free your mind of ignorance and be anxious to learn the truth, especially in the one thing that is needful, lest you fall a prey either to skepticism or to errors. Skepticism will make you indifferent and errors will lead you astray.

In Accordance with Buddha’s teachings, the Buddhists who are aware of these teachings should cooperate with those who have similar thoughts and values, i.e. with the religious, righteous and reformers of the world, in order to make a world in which there is no sign of injustice, oppression, and corruption.

The source of all conflicts

Minor Details

The followers of religion can practice the details of their faith and their rituals as it is laid out in their particular scriptures. However, the particular views of scholars, leaders and religious organizations should not be considered as being divine and must not be treated as commandments of God. Their writings should be considered as the personal views of such persons, and there may be no certainty of such views being either right or wrong. It is necessary to set aside the differences that exist because of the details and rituals of each religion and do not allow them to give rise to disputes and create division. Preventing divisions and mistrust create the opportunity to unite the religious, righteous and reformers to achieve the goal of all the prophets and the holy scriptures, which is to build a world that is free of injustice, oppression, corruption, poverty, ignorance, hatred, extremism, prejudice, racism and war. In such a world humankind may live in happiness, with fulfillment, contentment, kindness and peace of mind.

The Quran view on details

Quran verse 98:5 states, “And they were ordered to serve God alone, being sincere to Him in the way of life (religion) as a monotheist, and perform mandatory prayer and give to mandatory charity. And that is the lasting (and the right) way of life (religion).” We can see how God simplifies the religion. There is no mention of the details and traditions, because God does not see them as part of religion.

Chapter 11, Verse 118:

"If your Lord wanted, He would have made people a single community (of faith), but they will not stop to disagree."

Chapter 5, Verses 44-48:

“44- We sent down the Torah, there is light and guidance in it. The prophets, those who submitted (to God), and the devoted ones and the religious scholars judge the Jews with it, because they were made guardians of God's book and they were witnesses to it, so do not fear people but fear Me, and do not trade my signs for a small price. And anyone who does not judge by what God has sent down, then they are disbelievers.

45- And We prescribed for them in it, that life for life, eye for eye, nose for nose, ear for ear, and tooth for tooth, and for the wounds is fair retaliation. And whoever donates it (as charity and gives up the retaliation) then that is an atonement for him (for his sins). And anyone who does not judge by what God has sent down, then they are wrongdoers.

46- And after them, We sent Jesus, son of Mary, confirming what was before him in the Torah, and We gave him the Gospel, in which there is guidance and light, and confirms what was there before it from the Torah, and a guide and advice for those who are cautious (of God).

47- And people of the Gospel (Christians) should judge by what God has sent down in it. And anyone who does not judge by what God has sent down, then they are disobedient ones.

48- And We sent down the book to you in truth, confirming what was before it from the book and a guardian over it, so judge between them by what God has sent down and do not follow their desires, away from what came to you of the truth. For each of you We made a statute and a procedure, and if God wanted, He would have made you a single community (of faith), but He shall test you with what He gave you, so compete in (doing) good. You all return to God, then He informs you about what you used to disagree about.”

Chapter 42, Verse 13:

“He legislated for you the way of life (religion) that He instructed Noah to it, and what We revealed to you, and what We instructed Abraham and Moses and Jesus to it, to uphold the religion and do not become divided in it.”

Looking at these verses, God is informing everyone that there is guidance and light in the Law (the Torah, Old Testament), the Gospel (New Testament) and the Quran. Each one of these scriptures confirms the previous one, and God intentionally made people different, and He will judge everyone based on the scripture they believe in. No one should make division in religion, and everyone should set aside their differences, practice their rituals and details, and unite with one another to achieve the goal of religion.

The New Testament view on details

Matthew 15:1-13

“Some scribes and Pharisees arrived from Jerusalem to see Jesus. They asked him, “Why do your disciples disobey our age-old tradition? For they ignore our tradition of ceremonial hand washing before they eat.”

Jesus replied, “And why do you, by your traditions, violate the direct commandments of God? For instance, God says, “Honor your father and mother,” and “Anyone who speaks disrespectfully of father or mother must be put to death.” But you say it is alright for people to say to their parents, “Sorry, I can’t help you. For I have vowed to give to God what I would have given to you.” In this way, you say they do not need to honor their parents. And so, you cancel the word of God for the sake of your own tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you, for he wrote, “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship is useless, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God.””

Then Jesus called to the crowd to come and hear. He said, “Listen, and try to understand. It’s not what goes into your mouth that defiles you; you are defiled by the words that come out of your mouth.”

Then the disciples came to him and asked, “Do you realize you offended the Pharisees by what you just said?”

Jesus replied, “Every plant not planted by my heavenly Father will be uprooted, so ignore them. They are blind guides leading the blind, and if one blind person guides another, they will both fall into a ditch.””

Matthew 21:28-31

“But what do you think about this? A man with two sons told the older boy: “Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.” The son answered: “No, I won’t go,” but later he changed his mind and went anyway. Then the father told the other son: “You go,” and he said: “Yes, sir, I will.” But he didn’t go. Which of the two obeyed his father? They replied: “The first.””

Luke 6:46

“So why do you keep calling me ‘lord, lord!’ when you do not do what I say?”

Romans 2:13

“For merely listening to the law does not make us right with God. It is obeying the law that makes us right in his sight.”

James 2:14-20

“What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? ... So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless. Now someone may argue, “Some people have faith; others have good deeds.” But I say, “How can you show me your faith if you do not have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.” You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. How foolish! Can’t you see that faith without good deeds is useless?”

James 2:24, 26

“So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone... Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.”

These verses point out that words alone, and as Isaiah puts it, “honoring with their lips” do not make one righteous. The works and actions are essential, as it is said in Titus 1:16 “They claim they know God, but they deny him by the way they live. They are detestable and disobedient, unfit for doing anything good.” Being righteous requires faith as well as good deeds and actions, no one will be righteous by words alone, it will require good deeds.

These verses also affirm that: any instructions or commands that are not from God should be destroyed; because they will result in conflicts, disputes, and divisions.

The Old Testament view on details**Deuteronomy 4:2**

“Do not add to or subtract from these commands I am giving you. Just obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you.”

Deuteronomy 12:32

“So be careful to obey all the commands I give you. You must not add anything to them or subtract anything from them.”

Proverbs 30:6

“Do not add to his words, or he may rebuke you and expose you as a liar.”

Leviticus 22:31

“So you shall keep my commandments and do them.”

Clearly, God emphasizes that nothing should be added to his commandments nor be taken from them by anyone (no matter who, a religious leader, a political leader, or a dictator). This implies that man-made traditions and rituals should not be considered as God’s words, and everyone should keep God’s commandments and obey them.

Conclusion

By reviewing the holy scriptures and God's instructions, this article demonstrated that God's goal from sending all the prophets, the holy scriptures and His instructions is:

“To build a world in which Justice and Fairness applies to everyone; everyone's rights are protected; there is no sign of injustice, oppression, corruption, poverty, ignorance, indignity, hatred, extremism, racism, prejudice, and war; and humankind can live in happiness, contentment, and fulfillment with kindness and peace of mind.”

The main barrier to achieve this objective is overcoming the superstitions, misunderstandings, and false information that have been carved into people's belief systems. These beliefs have nothing to do with God's commandments and true goal of religion, and they have been created because people have concentrated on minor details and rituals of each faith and stopped listening to each other. To overcome this barrier, people should educate themselves with the truth about religion by reading and understanding the holy scriptures, and not following the beliefs of their parents or their leaders (religious and political) blindly. We should all follow God's instructions as He commands us in verse 7:3 “Follow what was sent down to you from your Lord and do not follow any masters/guides other than it/Him.” and we should always remember that it is God's religion and therefore He is the only authority to make laws in His religion as stated in verse 42:21 “Do they have associates who legislate part of the religion for them, which God has not allowed that?” and in John 12:49 “For I have not spoken on my own authority; but the Father who sent me gave me a command, what I should say and what I should speak.”

The only way to establish a world that God wants for humankind, i.e. a world free of injustice, poverty, corruption, ignorance, oppression, indignity, hatred, extremism, prejudice, racism, and war is by educating and uniting the religious, righteous, and the reformers against the dictators, oppressors, and other corrupt elements of society.

Today the widespread quest for the truth and thirst for knowledge is rampant and it has created an unprecedented opportunity to educate and unite humankind utilizing the power of technology and mass media communication.

It is noteworthy to mention that God has told us that He will not change the condition of the world or any nation unless people change their intentions and their actions. Therefore, it is important that people are made aware of the power of their actions and intentions and to begin the process of educating and uniting as soon as possible. The sooner this process starts, the sooner the invaluable goal of religion is achieved, and humankind can live in a world that they truly deserve, a world in which everyone can live in happiness, fulfillment, and peace.