Sacrifice is a meaningful concept in both Islam and Christianity, and between them there is even a degree of common understanding. In the end however, the difference in meaning is so BIG, that what Islam and Christianity each say about sacrifice reveals the MASSIVE irreconcilable divide between them.

Both Moslems and Christians will say that their life of worship and obedience is a sacrifice offered to God.

But here is the BIG difference.

In Islam, sacrifice is only ever about what people do.

In Christianity, sacrifice is primarily about what God does.

In Islam, God only loves those who sacrifice to him.

In Christianity, God so loves people, he sacrifices his Son for them.

Whereas in Islam God loves people because people love him, in Christianity people love God because God first loves them. This is a **MASSIVE, MASSIVE** difference, one which reveals Islam to simply be another form of "Works Based Religion" in opposition to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The story of Abraham being called by God to sacrifice his son, is a big story in both the Islamic & Christian traditions. Even though Islam replaces son Isaac with son Ishmael, both traditions speak of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son as an act of great trust and obedience to God.

Islam uses this story as an example for what Muslims are called to do, not that they are to sacrifice their sons, but that they are to sacrifice such things as time, energy, wealth and ego, for the sake of Allah.

In similar fashion Christianity also sees Abraham's action as an example for God's people. Far, far more than this however, **Christians see the Abraham story as pointing to the great act of sacrifice that God made for them**. Just as Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son, so was God (the Father) willing to sacrifice his Son. Whereas God ultimately stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son, and provided for Abraham an alternative – a ram caught in the thicket, God in turn however did not pull back from sacrificing his Son because in fact, his Son was the alternative – 'The Lamb of God'.

With the Abraham story God announces to the world that they are not to sacrifice their children to the gods / God, to appease and satisfy their gods. Rather, it is he, God, who would make the sacrifice to make people right with him. His Son would die for the sin of the world, so that people could be forgiven.

Here Islam comes in with a big protest.

Why would God have to sacrifice his Son in order to bring forgiveness to people? God is God! Surely, he can simply forgive people as he sees fit!

This is an understandable protest, and Islam presents God as one who very readily forgives sin, and in fact loves forgiving sin. Islam goes so far as to record God as saying that if Adam and Eve hadn't sinned, he would have started again with people who did sin, just so that he could have the pleasure of forgiving them!

So why then did the Son need to be sacrificed?

The answer lies in the holiness of God.

The Bible presents God as having a glory, a weight a majesty, a holiness, that sits far above all that he has created.

'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty', is the cry of God's creatures worshipping him.

If this God, heavy in glory and holiness, were to simply forgive sin he would be:

- making light of sin and evil,
- ignoring justice, and,
- compromising his own holiness.

God will never do that! He is God.

The story of Noah in the early part of the Bible, reveals just how serious sin is, and how serious God is about his holiness. Here God acts justly, putting almost all the people of the world to death because of their evil and corruption. God however also saves Noah and his family, revealing that the holy God is also a God of love. Rather than wipe out all humanity, he preserves the human race through Noah, and makes a new start with them. Although Noah is defined as 'righteous' in God's sight, due to his trust in God, this does not mean he is sinless. Following the flood God identifies that the 'intention of man's heart is evil from their youth'.

Given that God destroyed the people of Noah's time because they were evil and corrupt, how could the Holy God now make a new start with humanity, given that humanity was still evil?

The Bible goes on to tell the story of how God chose Abraham, and chose Abraham's offspring through Isaac to be his special people. God makes it clear that he did not choose them because they were somehow holier or mightier than any other people. These were sinful people he chose. So how could the holy God put up with them, live among them?

This is where sacrifice comes in.

God set up a system of sacrifice, where the sin of the people would be placed onto animals, with the animals then paying the penalty for the people's sin, so that sin is punished and justice is served, but the people are not destroyed.

God always intended that the special relationship he initiated with the Jewish people, would come to be extended to all the peoples of the world. This would happen through a **Messiah** God promised to the Jewish people but who would be not only for them, but for all people. Christians believe Jesus Christ is this promised Messiah. **Christians believe that JESUS is the fulfilment of the Jewish system of sacrifice**. In truth the sacrifice of animals could never suffice as due payment for human sin. Animal sacrifice was a temporary holding measure, until God sent the Messiah. **It is JESUS who became the sufficient sacrifice for all humanity's sin**. He is sufficient because as a true human being he could represent all humanity. But here's the thing – how could one man, even if that man was sinless, pay for the sin of all people? No man can do that. But God can and God did, because Jesus was not only true man, he was and is true God.

Most of the Jews of Jesus day (and to this day) did not recognize Jesus as their Messiah. They were not expecting their Messiah to die on a cross. But it was their prophets who had prophesied 100s of years earlier that he would be sacrificed in place of the people.

'He was wounded for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities; … and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.' *Isaiah 53*.

Here, Islam brings in another protest. *Surely, it is not just that one person bears the sin of another!*

Fair enough. It is totally true to say that each one of us has to take responsibility for our own sin. It is vital that instead of blaming others, excusing our actions, justifying ourselves, minimizing our sin, we instead face the evil inside us. This is actually something Islam does not do. It denies that the 'intention of man's heart is evil from their youth'. Islam presents people as being born uncorrupted and 'free' to choose obedience. This sets Muslims up to not see anything much of the true evil that resides within – a fundamental heart level rebellion against God.

Taking responsibility for our sin and evil includes facing the reality that no matter how hard we try to be godly, we can never wipe out the due penalty for our sin – eternal death. Our only hope is to flee to Jesus and come under the covering of his great sacrifice for us.

'For the wages of sin is death. But the free gift of God in Christ Jesus our Lord is eternal life.' *Romans 6:23*

'For God so loved the world he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in Him would not perish, but have eternal life.' *John 3:16*

Why did God the Father have to sacrifice His Son?