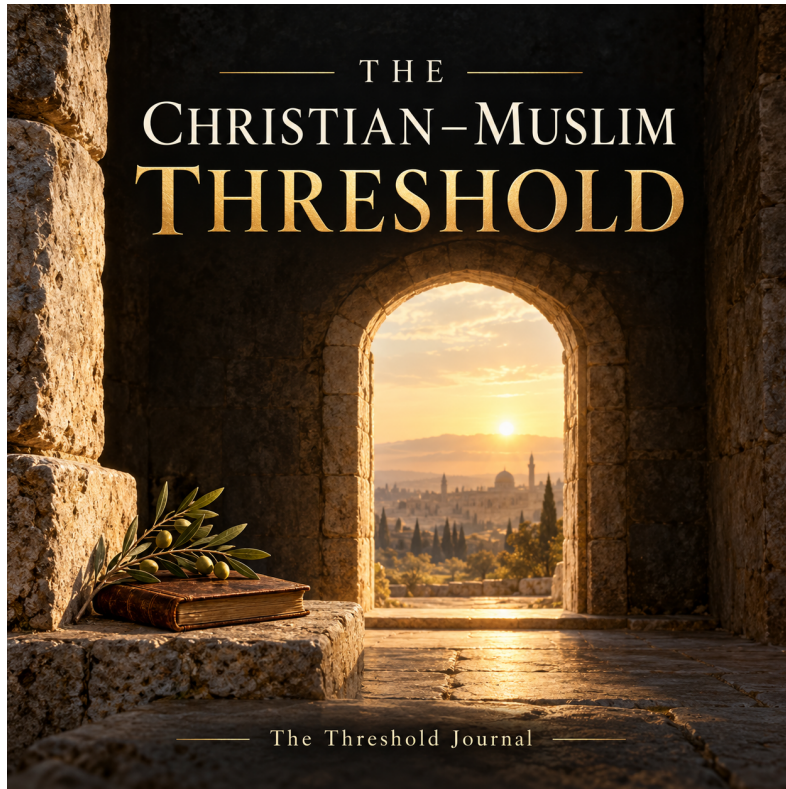


The Christian-Muslim Threshold

Complete Written Collection | Eight Episodes



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Produced by The Threshold Journal

About this collection

Did Paul change the message of Jesus? An eight-part exploration of Paul, Jesus, scripture, and religious authority at the meeting point of Christianity and Islam.

From Ibn Hazm and tahrif to one God and one Lord, the shared table, God's law, and the Messiah, the series distinguishes historical evidence from theological judgment. Its Christian readings take Muslim objections seriously and invite careful engagement with primary texts.

The aim is honest disagreement: remaining faithful to our convictions while describing another person's beliefs accurately and treating our neighbours justly.

This English reading edition brings together the complete narration texts of the eight-part series. It preserves the series' Christian theological perspective while distinguishing historical questions from confessional judgments. The author's professional description has been updated for this edition.

The cover is symbolic artwork, not a documentary photograph of a specific location.

Watch and listen

[The Christian-Muslim Threshold on YouTube](#)

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EPISODE 1

Did Paul Change the Message of Jesus?

Did Paul change the message of Jesus?

For many Christians, Paul is the apostle who carried the gospel across languages and borders. For some Muslim critics, he is the figure who redirected the teaching of Jesus into a religion Jesus would not have recognized.

The same man stands at the center of two very different accounts of Christian origins.

Before we decide between them, we need to ask what the accusation actually means. What did Paul change? How would we know? And does a disagreement about his theology establish that he deliberately corrupted a message entrusted to him?

Welcome to The Christian-Muslim Threshold.

I approach this conversation as an independent researcher and public ethicist living in Istanbul, where Christianity and Islam are part of the same city, but often tell different stories about the past.

This series begins with a commitment to describe those stories accurately. We can take our own faith seriously while listening carefully to the reasons another tradition gives for rejecting it.

Consider the familiar claim: Jesus taught the worship of one God, but Paul turned attention toward Jesus himself. Jesus lived within Jewish religious life, but Paul opened the community to people who did not observe its central practices. Therefore, the argument concludes, Paul replaced the religion of Jesus with a religion about Jesus.

That is a powerful explanation. It brings several difficult questions together and gives them a single answer.

But a powerful explanation still needs evidence.

The first difficulty is chronological. Paul's undisputed letters are among the earliest surviving Christian writings. Some were written in the fifties of the first century, before the written Gospels reached the forms in which we now read them.

This does not prove that Paul was right. It means that he belongs inside our earliest evidence for Christianity. We cannot simply place him outside that evidence and assume we already possess a complete, uncontested picture of everything that came before him.

The historian must work with sources that preserve both convictions and arguments. Those sources require interpretation, including Paul's own account of himself.

Paul was not one of the disciples who accompanied Jesus during his public ministry. His claim to authority rests on what he understood as a revelation of Jesus Christ.

In his letter to the Galatians, he describes having persecuted the church before becoming a preacher of the faith he had opposed. He also reports meeting Peter and James, and later discussing his mission with leaders in Jerusalem.

A Christian may understand this calling as authentic. A Muslim may reject its authority. Historical investigation can examine Paul's testimony and relationships, but it cannot compel either listener to accept his claimed revelation.

We should keep that distinction clear.

There is another complication. In First Corinthians, Paul introduces his account of Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and appearances as a tradition he received and passed on.

At minimum, he presents himself as a transmitter of an existing proclamation. This gives us reason to question the simplest picture of a solitary inventor, while leaving open questions about exactly what he received and how he interpreted it.

Nor does the early record show a community without disagreement.

Paul's letters preserve disputes over authority, circumcision, and shared meals. In Galatians, he describes confronting Peter at Antioch because Peter had withdrawn from eating with non-Jewish believers.

The dispute concerned an ordinary human act: sitting together at a table. Yet it raised a much larger question. Could people from different backgrounds belong fully to the same community, and what would that belonging require?

We will return to that table in a later episode. For now, it reminds us that Christian origins involved arguments about how to live faithfully. The existence of an argument does not, by itself, tell us which participant was faithful or which was mistaken.

The Muslim objection also deserves a more careful hearing than it sometimes receives from Christians.

The Quran honors Jesus as the Messiah and a messenger of God, while rejecting claims that cross its understanding of God's oneness. From this perspective, an early Christian belief can still be judged theologically wrong. Showing that a belief appeared early does not establish that God authorized it.

That is a serious objection, and chronology alone cannot answer it.

Christians, in turn, receive Paul as an apostle whose letters belong to scripture. They understand his proclamation through their faith in Jesus Christ, including his death and resurrection. They do not generally see themselves as abandoning the one God of Israel when they confess Jesus as Lord.

The disagreement therefore reaches into how each tradition understands revelation and religious authority. It cannot be settled merely by finding a date on which everyone agrees.

Here the word "corruption" needs care.

Sometimes it refers to changing the wording of a text. Sometimes it refers to interpreting revelation in a way another tradition judges false. Sometimes it adds a further accusation: that someone knew the truth and deliberately betrayed it.

These claims require different kinds of evidence.

Rejecting Paul's interpretation does not automatically establish deceit. Equally, recognizing his sincerity would not require accepting his conclusions.

My proposal is that we begin by asking what Paul actually argues, what authority he claims, and why that claim is accepted or refused.

This leaves room for firm convictions. A Muslim can reject Paul's understanding of Jesus while describing it accurately. A Christian can defend Paul while acknowledging the force of the Muslim question.

Did Paul change the message of Jesus?

He profoundly shaped how Christian communities understood and proclaimed it. Whether that shaping was faithful interpretation or unacceptable distortion is the question we must examine, rather than assume we have already answered.

In the next episode, we will explore how the accusation of corruption took shape, with particular attention to Ibn Hazm and the idea of tahrif: the distinction between a text and its interpretation.

Our conversation begins there, with the patience to understand what we are disagreeing about.

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EPISODE 2

Why Is Paul Accused of Corrupting Christianity?

Ibn Hazm and Tahrif: Text and Interpretation

Why is Paul accused of corrupting Christianity?

The accusation seems simple. Jesus brought a message from God, and Paul changed it. But what, exactly, was changed? The words of a revelation? Their meaning? Or the authority by which a community understood them?

Those questions lead us into one of the most important concepts in Muslim-Christian debate: tahrif, often translated as distortion or corruption.

Welcome to The Christian-Muslim Threshold.

In this episode, we turn to Ibn Hazm, the eleventh-century Muslim scholar of Andalusia, and to a distinction that can make this difficult conversation more precise: the difference between a text and its interpretation.

Imagine a message carefully copied and preserved. Every word remains intact. Yet someone reads it in a way its author never intended. The wording has survived, while the meaning has been redirected.

Now imagine a different case. Someone removes a sentence, inserts another, and presents the altered document as the original.

These are different problems. The first concerns interpretation. The second concerns the wording itself. A religious dispute may involve both, but the evidence needed to examine each will differ.

Muslim discussions of tahrif commonly distinguish corruption of the text from distortion of its meaning. The distinction is useful, although historical writers do not always fit neatly into one category. An author might challenge the wording of scripture in one passage and its interpretation in another.

The Quran contains warnings about the handling of revelation. In its second chapter, it describes a group who heard God's words and knowingly altered them after understanding them. A nearby passage condemns people who write something with their own hands and then claim that it comes from God.

These are serious accusations. But the passages do not name Paul or provide a detailed account of how Christianity developed. Applying them to Paul requires a further historical and theological argument.

That further argument is where later Muslim scholarship becomes important.

Ibn Hazm was a jurist and a formidable religious controversialist. In his major work, *al-Fisal*, he examined other religious traditions while defending the truth of Islam. His criticism of Christianity included questions about its doctrines, its scriptures, and how those scriptures had been transmitted.

He compared biblical accounts and treated what he regarded as contradictions as evidence against their reliability. He also questioned the connection between Christian writers and the events they described. His concerns reached well beyond the actions of one apostle.

Paul nevertheless presented a particular difficulty. He had not accompanied Jesus during his public ministry, yet Christians accepted his letters as authoritative. Ibn Hazm questioned whether Paul's limited contact with Peter could have given him adequate knowledge of the teaching he claimed to transmit.

The issue was therefore also one of authority. What entitled Paul to teach in the name of Jesus? What made his interpretation trustworthy?

For Christians, Paul's calling and apostolic witness help answer those questions. A critic who rejects that calling will assess the same claims differently. Before either side invokes corruption, it helps to recognize this disagreement about the grounds of trust.

There is another difference that can easily disappear in debate.

The Quran speaks of God giving Jesus the Gospel, the Injil. Many Muslim accounts distinguish that revelation from the four canonical Gospels and the larger collection Christians call the New Testament.

Christians understand those writings through the idea of inspiration. In Catholic teaching, God works through human authors who use their own abilities and write within particular circumstances. Their human authorship is part of how scripture is understood as bearing God's word.

Consequently, when Christians point to the Gospels, they are not claiming that Jesus personally wrote four books. They receive them as authoritative witnesses to his life and teaching.

A Muslim critic may still reject that understanding. But the discussion becomes clearer once we recognize that the two sides are making different claims about what a revealed scripture should be.

Ibn Hazm's importance should not make him a spokesman for every Muslim interpretation. The history of tahrif includes disagreements about the scope and nature of distortion. There is no need to flatten that history into a single voice before taking its objections seriously.

Nor should we turn a medieval argument into an eyewitness report about the first century. Later scholars can preserve earlier traditions and make valuable arguments. Their distance from an event does not automatically discredit them. It does require us to examine how their account is supported.

The same discipline applies to Christian defenses of Paul.

If we claim that a particular text was changed, we should identify the passage and examine its transmission. If we claim that an interpretation distorts a message, we should explain the interpretive limits we believe it crosses.

And if we accuse a person of deliberate deception, we need evidence for that intention. Disagreement with a conclusion cannot do all of this work by itself.

A well-preserved letter can contain an argument another believer judges mistaken. Conversely, finding a copying difference does not tell us whether the writer's theology was sound. The history of the words and the truth of the teaching are connected questions, but they are not interchangeable. Keeping them distinct prevents either side from asking a manuscript to settle a matter of faith on its own.

This is especially important when Paul becomes the explanation for every difference between Christianity and Islam. His role was consequential, but a complete account of Christian development must also consider other communities and later interpreters.

The accusation can now be stated more carefully. A Muslim critic may argue that Paul's understanding of Jesus gives him a role incompatible with God's oneness. Or that Paul's treatment of religious law exceeds the authority of a faithful interpreter.

Christians will contest those judgments. Yet these are recognizable theological objections that can be discussed through texts and arguments, without first deciding that the other side must have acted dishonestly.

We have not solved the debate by separating text from meaning. We have made it possible to ask a better question: where, precisely, does an interpretation become a distortion?

That question belongs to anyone who believes a sacred message must be received faithfully.

In the next episode, we will turn to Paul's own language about God and Jesus. What did he mean when he spoke of one God and one Lord? How did he understand himself within Jewish belief in the one God, and why does his answer remain difficult for Muslim theology?

Understanding begins when we can name the disagreement clearly enough to examine it together.

Produced by The Threshold Journal.

EPISODE 3

One God, One Lord: How Did Paul Understand Jesus?

Can someone confess one God, call Jesus Lord, and still believe that God is one?

For Christians, that question may sound familiar. For Muslims, it may sound like the beginning of a contradiction. And for anyone reading Paul carefully, it opens a question that deserves more than a slogan.

Welcome to The Christian-Muslim Threshold. In this third episode, we turn to a short passage with enormous consequences: First Corinthians, chapter eight, verse six. What does Paul mean when he speaks of one God and one Lord? And where, exactly, does Christian-Muslim disagreement begin?

The setting is surprisingly ordinary. Paul is discussing food. Some believers in Corinth are eating meat associated with sacrifices to idols. Others, whose lives had been shaped by those religious practices, find the experience troubling. What looks like an ordinary meal to one person can feel like a return to idolatry to another.

This is where Paul's confession appears. Against the many beings worshipped as gods and lords, he speaks of "one God, the Father," and "one Lord, Jesus Christ." He describes the Father as the source and goal of existence, while describing Jesus as the one through whom all things, and the believers themselves, exist.

There is a distinction between the Father and Jesus. There is also a remarkable connection between them. Any interpretation has to account for both.

To hear the force of this language, we need to remember the Jewish confession known as the Shema. In Deuteronomy, chapter six, Israel is called to acknowledge the Lord as its God and to give him undivided love and allegiance. God's oneness concerns worship as well as belief.

Many scholars hear an echo of that confession in Paul's words. The vocabulary of God, Lord, and oneness makes the connection significant. Paul is speaking within the world of Jewish Scripture, even as his claims about Jesus raise difficult questions about how that inherited language is being used.

Richard Bauckham offers one influential interpretation. He argues that Paul includes Jesus within the unique divine identity of the God of Israel. On this reading, Jesus is not another deity placed beside God. Jesus participates in the identity of the one God whom Israel confesses.

The language about all things existing through Jesus matters here. For Bauckham, the connection to creation places Jesus within what uniquely identifies God. Calling Jesus Lord, in this setting, is therefore much stronger than calling a respected teacher master.

But this interpretation remains debated. James Dunn asks whether Paul's language must be understood as dividing the Shema between the Father and Jesus. He pays close attention to the distinction between God as the origin of all things and Christ as the one through whom God acts.

That brings us to the idea of divine agency. An agent acts with another's authority. Jewish traditions could speak about God's Wisdom or Word as the means of his action. Such language gives us a historical setting in which to examine Paul's claims, although it does not automatically settle what status he assigns to Jesus.

The question is how far the comparison reaches. Is Jesus being described through the language of God's appointed representative? Does he share in God's unique identity? Or do these categories overlap in ways that our modern labels struggle to capture?

A careful reading should leave room for the argument. It should also recognize how extraordinary the language is. Paul's Jesus occupies a place that cannot be explained simply by saying that he was a good teacher.

For a Catholic reader like me, the distinction between the Father and Jesus does not mean that Jesus must be outside the divine life. Christian faith distinguishes the Father and the Son while confessing one God. Yet we should not pretend that this one verse already provides the complete vocabulary of later Christian creeds. Reading Paul requires attention to his own words and setting.

This means we should resist isolating either half of the sentence. Reading only the reference to the Father leaves the claim about Jesus unexplained. Reading only the reference to Jesus can obscure the Father's place in Paul's confession. The whole sentence holds the interpretive challenge, and the surrounding argument tells us why it matters.

Now consider a Muslim response. Tawhid, the affirmation of God's oneness, does not prevent God from acting through messengers. A prophet can teach, guide, and perform extraordinary signs by God's permission. The Qur'an itself presents Jesus' miracles in precisely that way, especially in chapter five, verse one hundred and ten.

But receiving authority from God is different from sharing God's divinity. In mainstream Islamic theology, a messenger remains God's creature and servant, however exalted his mission may be. Chapter four, verse one hundred and seventy-one, honours Jesus as the Messiah and God's messenger while rejecting divine sonship and affirming God's oneness.

So the disagreement cannot be resolved merely by pointing out that Paul distinguishes Jesus from the Father. A Muslim reader can acknowledge that distinction and still ask whether the role assigned to Jesus crosses the boundary between Creator and creature.

Nor can a Christian answer merely by saying that Jesus acts on God's behalf. For Christians who confess his divinity, his relation to God goes beyond the authority of a prophet. An explanation that makes the disagreement disappear by reducing Jesus to a messenger would fail to represent their faith.

We can now state the issue more precisely. Paul presents his confession in opposition to idolatry. Christians can understand that confession as faithful to God's oneness. Muslims can understand the elevation of Jesus within it as incompatible with tawhid. Historical context helps us understand the claim; it does not require either community to accept the other's conclusion.

That is a more useful conversation than beginning with the assumption that Paul simply forgot there was one God. We can examine whether his confession preserves monotheism, transforms its expression, or exceeds limits that another religious tradition

regards as essential. Each judgment needs reasons.

There is also something fitting about the passage's setting. A discussion about God's oneness appears inside a question about how believers treat one another. Paul's concern includes the damage that confident people can do to someone else's conscience. We might bring that concern into our own discussions: careful understanding should make us more responsible in how we speak.

In the next episode, we will turn to Philippians, chapter two. Its language of humility, self-emptying, and exaltation sharpens the question we have opened today. Did Paul make Jesus divine? And how should we read a passage that has shaped Christian belief for centuries?

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EPISODE 4

Did Paul Make Jesus Divine? Reading Philippians 2

If Jesus is divine, why does he humble himself, obey, and receive glory from God?

For some readers, those actions seem to challenge his divinity. For others, they reveal what divine love looks like. The same passage can lead us toward different conclusions, depending on how we understand its beginning, its movement, and its final confession.

Welcome to The Christian-Muslim Threshold. In this fourth episode, we turn to Philippians, chapter two, and ask: did Paul make Jesus divine? Before we answer, we need to hear what this remarkable passage actually says.

Paul introduces it while asking his community to put aside rivalry and self-importance. He wants believers to take the needs of others seriously. His account of Jesus appears within that appeal. The question of who Christ is becomes inseparable from the question of how his followers should live.

The passage describes a movement downward, followed by exaltation. Christ is associated with the “form of God,” yet chooses the condition of a servant. He enters the vulnerability of human life and follows the path of obedience as far as death by crucifixion. God then raises him to supreme honour, and the whole creation is called to acknowledge his lordship.

Many readers call these verses a hymn. Some scholars think Paul is drawing on an earlier confession; others question that reconstruction. Its poetic character does not tell us exactly who composed it or when. What we can say is that Paul makes this account central to his appeal.

The opening is crucial. A widespread Christian interpretation understands it as describing Christ's existence before his earthly life. The one who shares divine glory freely enters the human condition. The story is therefore read as incarnation, followed by suffering and exaltation.

On that reading, Paul is proclaiming the divine Christ who became human. He is not describing a merely human teacher who earns a promotion into godhood. That distinction matters when we ask whether Paul made Jesus divine. We have to distinguish his claim about Jesus from our judgment about whether that claim is true.

One difficulty concerns how the passage describes Christ's relation to equality with God. English translations vary: some emphasize something to be grasped, others something to be exploited. The underlying expression has generated substantial debate. A translation emphasizing exploitation suggests that Christ does not use his status for personal advantage. A reading emphasizing grasping can invite a different account of what he refuses.

We should not settle the entire argument by selecting the English wording that best suits our preferred conclusion. The whole passage, its scriptural background, and its purpose need to be considered together.

Another famous expression is that Christ “emptied himself.” The theological term is *kenosis*. But the passage does not supply a list of divine qualities that Christ supposedly discarded. It describes his self-emptying through the taking of a servant's condition and the path of humility.

In Catholic teaching, becoming human does not mean that the Son stops being divine. His humanity is real, and his divinity is retained. The self-emptying is understood within that confession. Explaining the text as God temporarily ceasing to be God would misrepresent this Christian understanding.

Christian readers consequently ask how the divine Son lives a genuinely human life. His acts of obedience and the Father's exaltation of Jesus are read within that larger account. They are not treated as an automatic denial of his divinity. This is the interpretation a Muslim critique needs to address.

Michael Gorman develops a striking theological reading. He argues that Christ's self-giving reveals God's character. Humility and service express divine love rather than interrupting it. This approach connects the passage's account of Christ with its ethical purpose: believers are called to let that same pattern shape their relationships.

There are other scholarly approaches. James Dunn has drawn attention to the contrast between Christ and Adam. Humanity's failure is answered by Christ's obedience. Where the story of Adam raises the temptation to become like God, Christ follows a path of faithful humility.

The extent of that connection is disputed. Some interpreters see an Adam pattern alongside Christ's pre-existence; others use it to argue for a different reading of the opening. An echo of Adam, if present, does not by itself resolve every question about Christ's status.

Then comes the climax. The confession is “Jesus Christ is Lord,” and its purpose is “to the glory of God the Father.” Christ's exaltation remains connected to the Father. Yet the honour given to Christ has a universal scope.

This language recalls Isaiah, chapter forty-five, where the God of Israel declares his uniqueness and receives the allegiance of all. Richard Bauckham argues that applying this scriptural language to Jesus includes him within God's unique divine identity. For this interpretation, the climax goes well beyond honouring an unusually important messenger.

Other readers emphasize that God grants the exaltation and that the confession ultimately glorifies the Father. The question becomes whether this is the honour of God's supreme representative, or the recognition of someone who shares God's divinity. Neither the language of obedience nor the language of universal lordship should be allowed to disappear.

A Muslim reader can take the account of humility seriously while rejecting the Christian conclusion about divine identity. In mainstream Islamic theology, being honoured by God does not make a messenger divine. The Qur'an honours Jesus as Messiah and messenger while rejecting divine sonship. Its account also differs over the crucifixion, so the disagreement concerns both Jesus' identity and the story told about him.

As a Catholic, I read this passage within the faith that Christ truly became human without ceasing to be divine. I can explain that belief and recognize why a Muslim reader finds it

unacceptable. A fair conversation requires each of us to understand the claim before evaluating it.

So did Paul make Jesus divine? Philippians two shows Paul expressing extraordinary claims about Jesus through the language of Scripture, humility, and exaltation. The accusation that he simply invented a new god does not explain this argument. But recognizing its depth does not oblige a Muslim reader to accept its theology.

The passage also leaves a practical question. What happens when religious conviction becomes a way of asserting our importance? Paul brings his readers back to service. Whatever conclusions we reach about his Christology, we should notice that his appeal challenges rivalry and demands attention to others.

In the next episode, a dispute between Paul and Peter will bring that challenge to the table. Who belongs there? Who is being excluded? And why does Paul think a shared meal can reveal whether a community is living faithfully?

Produced by The Threshold Journal.

EPISODE 5

Paul and Peter: Who Belongs at the Table?

Imagine being welcomed at a table, sharing the same bread as everyone else, and then discovering that someone important will no longer eat with you. Nobody needs to announce that you are inferior. The separation can communicate that message by itself.

This is the kind of question that lies behind one of the most revealing disputes in Paul's letters.

Welcome to The Christian-Muslim Threshold. In this fifth episode, we turn to Galatians, chapter two. Paul confronts Peter in Antioch, and a disagreement about shared meals becomes an argument about belonging, faith, and God's people.

Paul calls Peter Cephas, another name for the same apostle. According to Paul's account, Peter had been eating with Gentile believers: followers of Jesus who were not Jewish. Then certain people arrived from James, and Peter withdrew from those meals. Paul attributes that withdrawal to fear of the circumcision group. Other Jewish believers followed, including Barnabas.

Paul objects publicly. He sees Peter's conduct as putting pressure on Gentiles to adopt Jewish ways. The separation at the table has consequences for the whole community. People previously welcomed together are now being divided.

We need to be careful about what we know. We have Paul's account of the confrontation, without Peter's own explanation. The precise meal arrangements and the visitors' concerns remain debated. Their connection with James does not by itself prove that James ordered Peter to withdraw. We should leave those uncertainties visible.

The dispute also appears after Paul describes cooperation with the Jerusalem leaders. He reports that James, Peter, and John recognized his mission, and that Titus, a Greek companion, was not compelled to be circumcised. Shared concern for the poor remained part of their agreement.

That earlier cooperation makes the Antioch confrontation more significant. Paul is challenging someone whose importance he recognizes. He presents the withdrawal as a failure to live consistently with the gospel they profess.

A confrontation between apostles is evidence of a real conflict. By itself, it does not tell us that one preserved Jesus' message while the other corrupted it. That judgment requires an argument about the content of their claims, not simply the fact that they disagreed.

Why should sharing a meal matter so much? Because practices can define belonging more forcefully than welcoming words. A community may say that everyone has been received by God while arranging its common life in a way that marks some members as unacceptable companions.

Paul's reasoning then moves into the famous language of Galatians two, verses fifteen and sixteen. He speaks as a Jew and includes Jewish believers in his argument. Being set right before God, he says, does not come through works of the law, but through faith in

Jesus Christ.

Justification concerns a person's relation to God. In this setting, it also has consequences for the shared community. If Jewish and Gentile believers depend on Christ, what justifies treating the Gentiles as people who still need another qualification before they can fully belong?

This is where scholarship associated with the New Perspective on Paul can help. N. T. Wright emphasizes the connection between justification and the question of who belongs to God's covenant family. A covenant is a relationship established by God, with promises and obligations. The table becomes a visible expression of that relationship.

On this reading, practices such as circumcision are important because they identify Israel as God's covenant people. Torah, the law of Moses, belongs to a history of divine guidance and communal faithfulness. It deserves to be understood within that history. Reducing Jewish religious life to an attempt to purchase God's approval would distort the setting.

Paul's controversial claim is that Gentiles are received through the Messiah without first becoming Jews. For him, making their full acceptance depend on adopting Jewish identity calls into question the sufficiency of what God has done in Christ.

But scholars disagree about how broadly Paul uses the phrase "works of the law." Some emphasize practices that distinguish Jews from Gentiles. Others argue that his claim reaches more widely into human obedience and the impossibility of establishing righteousness through law observance. The social setting helps us read the passage; it does not exhaust its meaning.

There is another interpretive question. The expression often translated as faith in Jesus Christ can also be read as the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. The first emphasizes believers' trust; the second emphasizes Christ's own fidelity. Paul also explicitly speaks of believing in Christ, so the alternative translation does not remove the community's response of faith. Both readings keep Christ central to his argument.

Does this mean that conduct no longer matters? Paul's letter gives us strong reasons to answer no. Later, he connects faith with love, warns against destructive behaviour, and tells believers to serve one another. Freedom carries obligations toward other people. We will examine his language about the law more closely in the next episode.

For now, consider a Muslim response. Islam also refuses to make ethnic origin the measure of a person's worth before God. The Qur'an, in chapter forty-nine, verse thirteen, speaks of peoples and tribes while identifying righteousness as the basis of honour. There is room here for a shared concern about dignity and religious belonging.

Yet that shared concern does not settle Paul's claim about the Messiah. A Muslim reader may ask what authorizes Paul to interpret God's covenant and its requirements in this way. The issue involves revelation and authority, as well as the welcome offered at a meal.

We should state this carefully. Islam does not simply deny that revealed requirements can change. In the Qur'an's account, Jesus confirms the Torah while permitting some things previously forbidden. The question is whether Paul's interpretation carries divine authority. Recognizing that distinction allows Muslim criticism to address his actual theological claim.

As a Catholic reader, I understand Paul's argument through God's action in Christ. A Muslim reader can reject that understanding while recognizing that Paul is reasoning about faithfulness to God. The disagreement remains substantial, but describing his motives as a desire to make religion easier does not explain the argument he gives.

The table also brings the question back to us. Do our shared practices express the dignity we say we recognize? When pressure arrives, do we continue to welcome the people we welcomed before? Religious leaders carry particular responsibility because others often follow their example.

In the next episode, we will turn to Romans and ask whether Paul abolished God's law. What does he mean when he says that faith upholds the law? And how can we distinguish his challenge to law observance from the claim that obedience no longer matters?

Produced by The Threshold Journal.

EPISODE 6

Did Paul Abolish God's Law? Reading Romans 3

Can a commandment be good, and still be unable to rescue us from the wrong we do?

We know something of that problem. Knowing that honesty matters does not always make us honest. Recognizing another person's dignity does not guarantee that we will respect it when doing so becomes costly.

Welcome to The Christian-Muslim Threshold.

In our last episode, a divided table raised the question of who belongs to God's people. Today, we turn to Romans and ask: did Paul abolish God's law?

His answer creates a challenge for anyone who thinks the matter is simple. In Romans three, verse thirty-one, he asks whether faith overturns the law. He rejects that conclusion and says that faith upholds it.

How can he say this after arguing that a person is justified apart from works of the law?

Here, justification concerns being set right before God. Paul is asking on what basis people are received by God, and how that reception includes both Jews and Gentiles.

First, we need to understand what law means here.

Paul is discussing Torah, the law of Moses, within the story of Israel's relationship with God. Torah includes commandments, worship, and the ordering of communal life. Treating it as a collection of arbitrary restrictions would miss the religious world in which Paul is reasoning.

He also uses the word law in different ways. Sometimes it refers to a governing principle. We should therefore attend to each passage before treating every occurrence as identical.

Romans three places Jews and Gentiles under the judgment of God. Paul draws on Israel's Scriptures to describe a human failure that reaches across their differences. Possessing revealed instruction gives people responsibility; it does not make them immune to sin.

He then describes God's saving action in Jesus Christ. He connects this gift with Christ's redeeming work, including his death. The argument rests on a claim about who Jesus is and what God accomplishes through him.

This righteousness is disclosed apart from the law, yet the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it.

That combination matters. Paul claims that Israel's Scriptures testify to what God has now done. His argument depends on their continuing authority.

The chapter moves toward the exclusion of boasting. If acceptance before God is a gift, religious identity cannot become grounds for claiming superiority.

Paul then asks whether God belongs only to the Jews. His answer includes the Gentiles, because God is one. The same God receives both through faith.

Here, belief in one God has consequences for belonging. Paul's account of a community gathered through Christ is part of his argument about God's unity.

Then comes the statement that faith upholds the law.

One verse cannot settle every question about what Paul expects Jewish and Gentile believers to observe. We need to read further to see how he understands that claim.

Romans four offers an important clue.

Paul turns to Abraham, whose trust in God was reckoned as righteousness before his circumcision. The sequence matters for his argument. Circumcision subsequently becomes a sign of a relationship already established through faith.

Paul presents Abraham as the father of believing Gentiles as well as Jews who follow his faith. He finds the possibility of their inclusion within Israel's own scriptural story.

The Torah itself supplies testimony for his claim. This helps explain how he can challenge making Gentiles adopt Jewish identity while continuing to appeal to the law.

But Paul's language elsewhere remains demanding.

In Romans seven, he speaks of believers being released from the law and serving in the new life of the Spirit. In the same chapter, he calls the law holy and its commandment good.

Those statements require us to distinguish the goodness of God's instruction from its ability to overcome sin in human beings.

In Romans eight, Paul attributes that saving work to God through the Son and the Spirit. He describes the law's righteous requirement being fulfilled in people who live according to the Spirit.

He sees a transformed relationship with God's commands, involving God's action and a changed human life.

This still leaves us with the practical question: does grace permit wrongdoing?

Romans six addresses precisely that temptation. Paul rejects continuing in sin because grace is abundant. Those who belong to Christ are called into a new life, with obedience and holiness.

Romans thirteen makes the ethical demand concrete. Paul recalls commandments against adultery, killing, stealing, and coveting, and connects them with love of neighbour.

For him, love fulfils the law because it does no harm to another person. Such love has consequences for how we act. It cannot be reduced to a reassuring feeling about ourselves.

A serious critic can nevertheless ask how this relates to Jesus.

In Matthew five, Jesus speaks of fulfilling the Law and the Prophets and warns against setting commandments aside. Reading this alongside Paul raises substantial questions about continuity.

A Christian interpretation must explain what fulfilment means and how Jesus' mission changes the situation of those who follow him. Repeating the word fulfilment does not, by itself, resolve the difficulty.

A Muslim reader may press the question further. What authorizes Paul to identify this change in the relationship between God's people and the law?

As we noted in the previous episode, the Qur'an itself presents Jesus as confirming the Torah while permitting some previously forbidden things. The issue is therefore the divine authorization of a particular change.

Understanding Paul's reasoning does not oblige a Muslim reader to accept his authority. It does allow the disagreement to address his actual claim about God's action in Christ.

As a Catholic reader, I understand grace as a gift that calls us into a changed life. Faith brings responsibilities toward God and our neighbour.

That reading also gives Christians a question to answer about ourselves. When we speak of freedom, do we become more truthful, more generous, and more willing to accept responsibility for harm?

Appealing to grace while excusing cruelty would betray the ethical demands Paul places on his communities.

So, did Paul abolish God's law?

He explicitly rejects that description in Romans three. His account of what it means to uphold the law nevertheless involves a profound claim about the Messiah, the Spirit, and the inclusion of Gentiles.

That is where careful disagreement should focus.

In the next episode, we will examine a title Christians and Muslims both give to Jesus: the Messiah. What does that shared title mean within each tradition, and how much agreement does it actually express?

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EPISODE 7

Jesus the Messiah: A Shared Title, Different Meanings

Imagine a Christian and a Muslim sitting together, speaking about Jesus.

Both call him the Messiah.

For a moment, it sounds as though they have reached an important agreement. And they have. Yet the conversation is only beginning, because each person needs to explain what that title means.

Welcome to The Christian-Muslim Threshold.

In the previous episode, we asked how Paul could speak of faith upholding God's law. His answer depended on what he believed God had done through Jesus.

Today, we turn to that central question. Christians and Muslims both identify Jesus as the Messiah. What do they affirm when they use this shared title?

First, a small clarification.

Christ is a title, not Jesus' surname. It comes from the Greek word for an anointed one. Messiah carries that meaning from its Hebrew background.

John's Gospel makes the connection explicit. In chapter one, Andrew tells his brother that they have found the Messiah, and the text explains the term as Christ.

The vocabulary belongs to the scriptural world of Israel. Anointing signifies being set apart for a particular role.

The title alone does not establish that its bearer is divine. Isaiah forty-five even calls Cyrus, the Persian ruler, God's anointed. That example reminds us to ask what a title means in its particular setting.

Christian belief about Jesus' divinity requires a wider argument about his identity, his relationship with the Father, and the texts through which Christians understand him.

The word Messiah cannot carry that entire argument by itself.

The Gospels also show that recognizing the title leaves questions about Jesus' mission unresolved.

In Mark eight, Peter identifies Jesus as the Christ. Jesus then speaks about the suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection that lie ahead.

Peter objects.

Within the narrative, he can recognize Jesus as Messiah while resisting what Jesus says about the path of that mission. The disagreement concerns what being the Messiah will involve.

This scene gives us a useful question: what story surrounds the title?

For Paul, that story includes Israel's promises and the death and resurrection of Jesus.

At the beginning of Romans, he describes the gospel as something promised through the prophets. He identifies Jesus with David's line and connects his identity as Son of God in power with the resurrection.

His understanding of Jesus remains tied to the Scriptures of Israel. He claims that God's saving purpose has come to fulfilment through this particular person.

First Corinthians fifteen makes the death and resurrection central. Paul recounts a proclamation he says he received and passed on: Christ died for sins, was buried, was raised, and appeared to witnesses.

He includes Peter and other apostles in that account. His presentation connects his preaching with a message shared beyond himself.

That does not settle every historical question about the tradition or prove Paul's authority to a Muslim reader. It does show why the Christian meaning of Messiah cannot be separated easily from the cross and resurrection.

Now consider the Qur'an.

In chapter three, verse forty-five, Mary receives the announcement of Jesus, identified as the Messiah. The passage describes him as honoured in this world and the next, and among those brought near to God.

This is a significant affirmation of Jesus' place. A Christian listener should recognize that the Qur'an treats him with profound honour.

But we also need to read the title alongside the Qur'an's other statements.

Chapter four, verse one hundred and seventy-one, identifies Jesus the Messiah as God's messenger, his word conveyed to Mary, and a spirit from him. The same passage warns against saying Three and rejects attributing a son to God.

The description gives Jesus distinction while setting limits on what may be claimed about him.

A Christian may hear the expression word from God and think immediately of John's Gospel. John speaks of the Word becoming flesh. Yet that association does not allow us to insert John's whole account into the Qur'anic passage.

We must attend to what each text affirms within its own argument.

Chapter five, verse seventy-five, calls the Messiah a messenger, honours his mother, and recalls that both ate food. The passage emphasizes their embodied human life.

As a Catholic reader, I also affirm Jesus' real humanity. The disagreement concerns how that humanity relates to the Christian confession of his divinity.

A shared recognition of his humanity therefore leaves the central theological question open.

The difference becomes sharper when we return to the cross.

Qur'an four, verse one hundred and fifty-seven, rejects the claim that Jesus was killed and crucified. Muslim interpretation commonly understands this as denying his crucifixion, although explanations of what happened vary.

We do not need to choose among those explanations here. The contrast with Paul's proclamation of the crucified and risen Messiah is already substantial.

The same title belongs to accounts that disagree about decisive events and their meaning.

How, then, should we use it in dialogue?

We can begin by recognizing the actual point of agreement: Jesus holds an honoured and distinctive place in both traditions, and both call him Messiah.

We can then ask what each tradition says about his mission, his relationship with God, and the sources that authorize its account.

These questions help us avoid mistaking familiar vocabulary for a complete shared confession.

They also help Christians hear a Muslim affirmation of Jesus without immediately treating it as an incomplete version of their own faith. Muslim belief deserves to be understood through its own claims.

The same care applies when Muslims listen to Christians. Christian language about the Messiah needs to be considered within its account of incarnation, salvation, and resurrection.

We can understand those accounts accurately while continuing to disagree about their truth.

As a Catholic, I confess Jesus as the Messiah within the faith that God has acted through his life, death, and resurrection. I cannot ask a Muslim listener to hear that confession as though its disputed claims were unimportant.

I can ask that we explain ourselves carefully, listen honestly, and resist turning a theological disagreement into a judgment about another person's sincerity.

A shared title gives us a place to begin. The meaning we give it tells us where the conversation must go.

In our final episode, we will bring the series together and ask: can Muslims and Christians disagree honestly? What would dialogue look like if we took both truth and our neighbour seriously?

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EPISODE 8

Can Muslims and Christians Disagree Honestly?

A conversation about faith can reach a moment when both people say: I understand what you believe, and I still disagree.

What happens next?

Do we begin looking for a weakness in the other person's character? Or can we keep speaking, with our convictions intact and our neighbour's dignity respected?

Welcome to The Christian-Muslim Threshold.

This is our final episode.

We began with a difficult question about Paul: did he change the message of Jesus? We have considered accusations of corruption, his language about Jesus, the conflict at Antioch, faith and law, and the meaning of Messiah.

The questions brought us to real differences about revelation, authority, and salvation.

Today, we ask what it would mean to disagree honestly.

Honest disagreement begins with an obligation to understand what we are rejecting.

A Christian who criticizes Islam should make the effort to learn what Muslims actually affirm. A Muslim who criticizes Paul should attend to the arguments he gives, the texts he uses, and the claims he makes about God.

A useful test is whether someone who holds that belief can recognize it in our description.

They may object to our conclusion. But if they must first correct our account of their position, the argument has barely begun.

We should also identify whose position we are describing. An individual believer, a classical commentator, and a contemporary scholar may give different explanations. Quoting one of them does not establish what everyone in that tradition believes. Where interpretations differ, naming the particular view makes our criticism fairer and easier to assess.

Consider the Christian confession that Jesus is divine.

A Muslim reader may reject it. An honest criticism should nevertheless recognize that Christians understand themselves to worship one God, and that Catholic belief includes Jesus' real humanity.

Likewise, a Christian should recognize that Muslim rejection of Jesus' divinity can express a serious commitment to God's unity. It should not automatically be treated as indifference toward Jesus or hostility toward Christians.

Understanding a conviction allows us to address its content more precisely.

The next obligation concerns the kind of question we are asking.

Some questions are historical. What does a letter say? What did a particular community believe? Which interpretations appear earlier, and what evidence supports that judgment?

Other questions concern theological authority. Was Paul authorized to interpret God's covenant through Christ? Which texts do we receive as revelation, and why?

Historical evidence can challenge a careless theological account. Yet describing when a belief appears does not by itself establish whether that belief is divinely authorized.

A discussion becomes clearer when we identify where the evidence ends and where a judgment of faith begins.

We also need care with accusations about motives.

A person may sincerely believe something we consider false. We can examine errors, inconsistencies, or harmful consequences without assuming that deception explains every disagreement.

This matters especially when speaking about Paul.

In the episodes on Galatians and Romans, we encountered someone reasoning about God's promises, the inclusion of Gentiles, and the place of Christ.

A Muslim reader can reject the authority of that reasoning. The criticism becomes more exact when it explains why the argument fails, rather than relying on a claim that Paul simply wanted an easier religion.

Christians owe the same care to Muslim accounts of revelation. Rejecting those accounts does not give us knowledge of every believer's intentions.

There is a further obligation: admitting uncertainty.

We did not have Peter's own response to the Antioch confrontation. We saw that scholars debate phrases such as works of the law. We recognized that a shared title, Messiah, does not settle the meaning each tradition gives it.

These limits should remain visible.

When we discover that a quotation was inaccurate, or that we repeated a claim without sufficient evidence, correcting it serves the truth we say we care about.

An argument can become stronger through revision.

Truth remains at stake. Christians and Muslims make claims about God and about events in history, and some of those claims conflict. We can ask which account is better supported and challenge an interpretation directly. Fairness requires giving the opposing claim its strongest accurate form, then explaining our reasons for rejecting it.

What about the way we speak?

The First Letter of Peter, chapter three, calls believers to explain the reason for their hope with gentleness and respect. Conviction carries responsibility for the manner in which it is expressed.

The Qur'an, in chapter twenty-nine, verse forty-six, instructs engagement with the People of the Book in the best manner, while distinguishing those who act unjustly.

Chapter five, verse eight, gives a demanding instruction about justice: hostility toward a people must not lead us to treat them unfairly.

These passages arise within different religious accounts. Both give believers reasons to examine their conduct when conviction meets disagreement.

As a Catholic, I also find guidance in the Second Vatican Council's declaration, *Nostra Aetate*.

Its third section expresses esteem for Muslims, recognizes their worship of one God, and acknowledges their reverence for Jesus while identifying the difference over his divinity.

It calls Christians and Muslims to mutual understanding and cooperation in justice, peace, and freedom.

The declaration places recognition and disagreement alongside each other. It gives Catholics a responsibility to encounter Muslims with respect while remaining clear about Christian faith.

We can test that responsibility in ordinary life.

Do we defend another person's freedom to worship when their beliefs differ from ours? Do we refuse a false accusation when it would benefit our own side? Can we work together to protect a child or help a family without requiring agreement about every doctrine?

Such actions give practical expression to our regard for another person.

They also remind us that a theological argument is addressed to someone with a life, a conscience, and responsibilities.

I speak throughout this series as a Catholic reader. I confess Jesus Christ within the faith of the Church, and I receive Paul's letters within that faith.

I have tried to explain that position openly, while taking Muslim questions seriously. A listener may remain unconvinced. The disagreement deserves a fair account.

So, can Muslims and Christians disagree honestly?

Yes, if we are willing to do the work: read carefully, describe each other accurately, distinguish evidence from conviction, correct mistakes, and practise justice when disagreement becomes uncomfortable.

This series has brought us to a threshold where convictions can be stated clearly and another person can still be welcomed.

The conversation can continue there.

Thank you for walking through these questions with me.

May our convictions make us more truthful, and our faith make us more just.

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