‘Following the actions of Muhammad is more important than following what he said.’ Evaluate this statement (12 marks).

Supporters would say that Muhammad’s actions are way more important as what he said because some of the things he did later became known as the 5 pillars of Islam and are fundamental expressions of faith within the Islamic tradition. For example we know from various Hadith that Muhammad approved of fasting as a way of showing submission to Allah. The Qur’an also supports fasting: “It was in the month of Ramadan that the Qur’an was revealed to as guidance for mankind…so any one of you who is present that month should fast.” This shows that fasting, as one of the 5 pillars carried out by Muhammad, is an important act that Muslims should all follow.

Rejecting views include the opinion that much of Muhammad’s actions would not be applicable to a modern context. For example, his various wars with competing tribes and seizing Makkah once he had established the Ummah in Madinah, needs to be understood in the context of 7th century Arabia. Although there are extremist Muslims who think they are carrying out lesser jihad by declaring holy wars against the West and copying the prophet with violent actions, this is a very misunderstood view. We now live in the 21st century and Islam is the world’s second biggest religion, meaning the act of trying to follow Muhammad’s actions as a warrior and political leader is completely inappropriate.

On the other hand, actions speak louder than words, so what Muhammad did is surely the best example that modern Muslims should follow. Although some Hadith are considered very authoritative, others are not and it is possible that over several centuries what has been recorded as something Muhammad said may have been misconstrued or mistranslated. This means what he did carries more authority than what he said and as the ‘seal of the prophets’ Muslims should attempt to copy his actions in their lives too.

Another argument against the statement is the view that neither Muhammad’s actions nor his words are as important as the guidance set out in the holy Qur’an. Muslim beliefs about Risalah (prophethood) state that the prophets were not divine, but human. As such, they are flawed, and so we can’t assume that everything Muhammad said and did is precisely what God wants. The Qur’an however is the word of God, so this should be the best thing for Muslims to follow.

In conclusion, I disagree with the statement as Muhammad’s words and actions are important. This is acknowledged in the Qur’an itself: “in the messenger of Allah you have a good example to follow.” Therefore as the seal of the prophets Muhammad provided words and actions for Muslims to follow in order to live a life according to God’s will.