

Islam and Christianity 9-8-02

As we approach the anniversary of September 11th we are constantly reminded about Islam and the Islamic community in our nation. There are somewhere between 5 to 7 million Muslims in the United States. The News Media always tells us that Jews and Christians and Muslims share the same God. In the church office there is a map of Israel on which is printed, '3 Religions - One God'.

Some time ago I shared a sermon called, Same God?. I caught some criticism for quoting the Koran when I was not familiar with it. After all, people could misquote the Bible and often do and we take offense to that. That is a valid criticism. In today and next week's sermons most of what I will be sharing comes from R. C. Sproul ministries and an interview with a former Muslim who was raised in a Muslim country. Unlike myself, he is very familiar with the generally accepted interpretations and scholarly comments on the Koran. Abdul Saleeb co-authored Answering Islam with Dr. Norman Geisler.

In our desire to find common ground and to be tolerant, we can't put our brain on hold. We need to think clearly about the fundamental differences **between these** two faiths. There are several areas in our faiths that are comparable but there are also fundamental issues that are not compatible. If we are to encourage and help Muslim people, we need to understand the differences in our beliefs. Understanding the differences also helps us appreciate the foundations of our faith.

Islam has a rich intellectual and cultural tradition. It is a coherent and systematic faith. Within that system of beliefs you will find four areas that are irreconcilable with Christianity. 1. View of the Godhead 2. View of Man 3. View of Christ 4. Nature and authority of the Bible. You will often hear the erroneous statement that, "All religions teach the same thing." These areas in dispute are the very foundation of what we believe. If there is not an agreement here on who God is and His relationship with us, then the statement that we serve the same God is not justifiable. We may agree on peripheral points but if the foundations are different then the reason for the points we do agree on is different. Any religion must answer the first two points, who is God and who is man. If true religion is about man's relationship with God then the philosophy to which we adhere will be profoundly affected by what we believe about that relationship.

Much of the argument of Islam toward Christianity is the same as modern liberal scholars' arguments. To answer Islam will also help us answer some of the trends in the world today. We need to know why we believe what we believe. The first area of contention is the Fatherhood of God. Both Muslims and Christians see God as sovereign, holy, all-powerful, forgiving and One who sends prophets to warn us. But Islam would never consider God as a Father. Jesus often referred to God as His Father and taught that we should address Him as Father. The Lord's Prayer sounds like blasphemy to Muslims, but to the Christian it is one of the most wonderful things about our relationship with God. As a Father nurtures and cares for his child,

correcting and disciplining, guiding and directing, instructing with love, so we see our God caring for us. The picture of a Father-child relationship runs throughout the New Testament. The Muslim objection goes something like this: If God **was** a father then he would have a consort. That is unthinkable. There is some debate as to whether Mohammed thought that Mary was literally considered the bride of God. That would have been a complete misunderstanding of the Christian belief on Mohammed's part.

Sura 1:12 Say He is God, the one and only God the Eternal, the absolute. He begetteth not nor is He begotten. There is no one like Him.

We agree on everything but "He begetteth not..." That strikes right at the favorite verse of all, John 3:16. *"God so love the world that He gave His only begotten Son..."* Interestingly enough John 1:12 says, *But as many as received Him to them He gave the power to become the sons of God, even to as many as believe on His name.* The process of birth is a problem to Muslims, but also the very idea that we could have a Father child relationship. Islam paints a picture of God that is much too distant and austere to consider Him as even a spiritual father.

Sura 19:35 It is not befitting to the majesty of God that He should beget a son. Glory be to Him. When He determines a matter He says to it "Be" and it is." Again we see the thought that producing sons implies a physical relation, which is a hold over from pagan religions of ancient past. Some Islamic scholars even add footnotes that imply Christians believe in the blasphemous idea that God has physical relations to bring about His son. (also see [Sura 2:116](#))

God is much more intimate in Judeo-Christian thought than in Muslim philosophy. In the Bible God is referred to as a shepherd, a wounded lover, and a bridegroom. The Koran only refers to God as Master – and those who worship Him are His servants. The New Testament does call us servants but also refers to us as sons, heirs, the bride, His chosen ones, and dearly loved. Even if the view of how Christ became a Son and how we become sons was corrected, there is still the fundamental difference of how the two religions perceive God. This is vital to our whole understanding of redemption. Consider 1John 3:1a (NIV) *1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!* How wonderful those words are in our ears and yet they sound like the height of arrogance to a Muslim. In an interview with 600 converts from Islam to Christianity, one of the most appealing factors for them was this intimacy of relationship with God as Father.

The story of Mephibosheth reminds me so much of the Bible's portrayal of our relationship with God. When David took over the throne of Israel he looked for a son of Saul to show kindness to. Saul had pursued and tried to kill David again and again. That is how we are in our flesh. That is our life before we were born anew. We hated the things of God and fought to see them extinguished. But here comes David, like Christ, full of forgiveness and remembering his promises. He finds this crippled son of Jonathan and adopts him. He eats at his table and is cared for.

Commented [Q1]: They say, "God hath begotten a son, glory be to Him." Nay to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and on the earth. Everything renders worship to Him. A Koran scholar's footnote says that "The Christian doctrine is here emphatically repudiated."

Even in the future when there is a question as to Jonathan's loyalty after all the favor shown him, David stands up for him. How like our Father who has adopted us as his own in spite of our family being in rebellion against Him, our crippled condition, and accusations against us. (See 2 Samuel 9 and 19)

The second major difference is how we see ourselves. The accepted historical Christian view is that Adam's sin infected the human race. Like begets like. As a sinner, Adam's children were born sinners. David said he was born in sin. (Psalm 51:5) The Apostle Paul wrote that through the first man Adam death reigned and many died by his trespass. (Romans 5:12-15) We see what happened in the garden as a severance of relationship that was irreconcilable through anything man could do. What we call "The Fall of Man" and see as the root of man's problem, the Koran describes as an error that was soon forgiven without any affect upon mankind in general. The Koran has God forgiving Adam for eating the hidden fruit. (Sura 2:35) It had no consequence on Adam or mankind. God just chose to forgive. In Islam man is not sinful by nature. There is no original sin. Here the world and liberal scholars agree, much to the delight of Islamic teachers. They say, "Be strong! Rise up! You can do it if you will just discipline yourself." Christianity says you are helpless and need a Savior. It goes on to say the only way you can live righteously is to let His life empower you. You can't save yourself or live a righteous life without Him.

Jonathan Edwards, a famous Bible preacher, taught that reason leads to universal sin. All are evil as the Bible teaches. If all were born innocent you would think some would stay that way, he argues. The counter argument is that society corrupts us, but the fact remains that society is merely made up of people. If those people are born innocent what happened to turn them all toward evil. The only answer is sin is inherent. Sin has affected the very nature of mankind.

Though the Koran teaches that God is holy, it only mentions the description twice. Islam says it teaches God's will and commands. The Bible teaches God's character, and then says that His character is the standard. Since the Koran lists the commands as the standard instead of the very nature of God, we have the source of the idea that man is not so bad, and pleasing God is within his ability. When the holiness of God is diminished then we can become demigods able to earn heaven on our own. That is the teaching of Islam.

The standard of the Biblical God is His own holiness. "Be holy because I am holy." Purity in thought, word and deed is too high a standard to be attainable by fallen man. It requires a Savior. The media constantly is teaching a relative standard that is not based on anything but your particular upbringing. "Then we can all be gods and don't have need of a Savior. All gods of all religions are equal and all ways to God are ultimately the same. Jesus died as good moral lesson to us all," the claim. This heresy has been around since the first century church and is called Palagianism. It is quite similar to Muslim belief. Do more good than evil and you should be allowed into heaven. Makes sense if you don't see yourself as having a sin nature that is in rebellion toward God. But if you see man as a fallen creature

Commented [Q2]: 5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me
Psalms 51:5 (NIV)

Commented [Q3]: 12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned-- 13 for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. 14 Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come. 15 But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!
Romans 5:12-15 (NIV)

needing a Savior you will cling to the cross of Jesus, knowing that the love of the Father sent His only begotten Son to pay a debt you could never pay.

This idea of being good enough for God reminds me of outcome-based education. If the student can't handle it, lower the standard so he feels good about himself. Islam sets a standard low enough to be attainable by man – obedience to a limited set of rules. It is very similar to Phariseeism. Just keep these rules and you will make it. If you can't keep the rules, try harder. In contrast, Titus 3:5 tells us that it is *"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He has saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Ghost."*

The real standard has never changed. "I am the LORD, I change not!" It has always been the righteousness of God. No man can attain to it for we are born with a deprived nature that is rebellious toward all the goodness that God is. We need a Savior. No man can do that because he has his own sins to account for. We need God to become a man and take the predetermined and just punishment in our place. That requires a God that is in a loving relationship with His children. All of these truths are anathema to Islam and to modern humanistic thinking.

Next week we will look at the other two issues, who is Christ and of what value is the Bible. Classic Christianity and Islam are worlds apart in their answers to these questions as well.

I want to remind you that I'm not sharing these issues to drive a wedge between Christians and Muslims. We do need to be honest about the points we disagree on. As Christians, we need to understand the foundations of our faith, appreciate our relationship with our Father and recognize how God deals with our fallen condition. When we have a clear understanding of our differences we can share without feeling threatened, knowing we have something to offer Muslims. Those Muslims who seek to know what the Bible really teaches will find the Bible's answers and perhaps seek that Father and child relationship that we so value.

One of the best witnessing tools I have heard of was when Christian women donned burquas to walk with Muslim women to their mosque so that they would not feel threatened after 9-11. What a powerful testimony in that act of love! We have something every Muslim needs – the truth that God the Father loves them and has sent His only begotten Son to save them from sin. Don't take the relationship of Father and child for granted. Relish it. Come to Him as you would to a loving Father, knowing He wants to give good gifts to His children. Thank Him for providing the one way to be right with Him – a way that you could never have handled on your own. We serve a good, holy, and loving Father. Let His life in you show the difference in our faith through love.