

Christians Confronting Cultural Issues

Session 7: Islam

This Week's Goal

- Muslims number about 1.7 billion worldwide.
- The various sects of Islam see themselves as the only true Muslims. Sunni do not recognize Shi'a as true Muslims.
- Muslims are the fastest growing non-Christian group immigrating to America, almost double the next group, Hindus.

After this week's study you will be able to-

- state basic Muslim beliefs.
- give a biblical response to each belief.
- suggest ways to witness to Muslims.

Acts 21:17-28

Islam is more than a system of beliefs that governs spiritual exercises or worship services; Islam is a lifestyle. For Muslims (only Anglos refer to them as Moslems) every facet of life is dictated by protocols found in the Qur'an and in the Hadith (sayings of Muhammed). Everything is explicitly addressed by a dictum.

Because Islam is a nationalistic and exclusive religion, the ramifications of conversion to Christianity are stark. When I became a believer in Jesus Christ in 1982, my father-my hero in every sense of the word-disowned me. In one fleeting moment I lost my family, my home, my people, my culture, and my identity. Everything I had ever known as reality and existence collapsed. My church became my family. As far as my people were concerned, I became an infidel, worthy only of death. That threat has been issued numerous times since.

For my kinsmen, surrendering to Jesus as Lord is like signing your own death warrant. As you study this week, bear in mind the prison that confines your Muslim friends. Salvation for believers is a triumph of grace, but for them it carries the bittersweet by-product of rejection, renouncement, and even martyrdom.

Witnessing Tip-Cultivate Relationships

When you approach Muslims, be very friendly and encourage them to talk first. Show genuine interest in their beliefs. Be familiar with Islamic beliefs and ask Muslims to show you passages from the Qur'an that you can examine together. Ask questions like: Will Islam guarantee the forgiveness of sins? Will it provide assurance of salvation? Be patient and do not argue. Otherwise, you may win the argument but lose a soul forever.

Like first-century Judaism, Islam has an almost violent adherence to its laws and a bloody ethic. It is impossible to understand Islam without first knowing its history. Islam is the youngest world

religion, founded in A.D. 610. The founder of Islam, Muhammed, was born at Saudi Arabia, the crossroads of commerce, in A.D. 570. As a Merchant he sold his goods to the countless thousands of people who traveled the Middle Eastern trade routes. He lost his mother and father at an early age and was reared by his grandfather first and then an uncle. He was exposed to Coptic Christians, a cult that believed Jesus became God at some point of His earthly life, perhaps at His baptism. This erroneous teaching radically affected Muhammed's misunderstanding of Christianity.

On his 40th birthday Muhammed had a seizure. The *Hadith* begin with a description of his "rolling on the ground" and "roaring like a camel." When he came out of the seizure, he described to his wife, Khadijah, a vision. She convinced him his vision was from God. These visions, which continued for years, formed the basis for the Qur'an, the written holy book of Islam, and the beginning of a new religion.

Muhammed believed that Jews and Christians had changed God's teachings and had abandoned the truth altogether. He therefore considered them hell-bound and cultic. The core of his religion centered on his understanding of God. The name for the Islamic god is Allah. Muhammed taught that Allah has 99 names of terror and glory. Allah is beyond human understanding and approach. Muhammed's teaching about Allah's names is fundamental to understanding Islam.

The nature of Allah is called *tawhid*, meaning absolute one. This is more than monotheism (belief in one God); this is a rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit in Islam is the angel Gibrael. No one-including Jesus-is called a son of God.

In spite of Muhammed's concept of God, some mainline Christian groups and missionary movements have recently taught that the Allah of the Qur'an and the God of the Bible are the same God. Let me be as clear as possible on this point: the Allah of Islam and the God of the Bible are not the same God. To say that they are shows a serious lack of knowledge of two major religions!

Fear motivates Muslims' decisions and actions because they have no assurance of favor with Allah. In contrast, Christians are driven by Christ's love.

When the Bible speaks of the fear of God, it refers to our absolute reverence. When Muslims fear Allah, they mean that they are afraid. Muslims' fear of direct, immediate and eternal reprisal drives virtually every deed. Unlike Muslims, Christians aren't terrified by God, because we believe that He is knowable and personal. God is one, but He has revealed Himself in the plural for Elohim (See Gen. 1:26). The Bible clearly reveals that God's oneness comprises three persons-Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (see Matt. 28:19). God's triune nature is part of His mystery and greatness.

Christianity differs from Islam in the conviction that good works do not earn forgiveness, which is a free gift of God's grace (see Eph. 2:8-9). Assurance of our status before God, doesn't depend on being 51 percent good through our own efforts but on being 100 percent saved by faith in Jesus Christ's atonement.

From Muhammed's 40th birthday in 610 until his death in 632, he vehemently preached the Islamic religion. The central message he preached? The Jews had Allah's message but corrupted it. The Christians had the truth but abandoned it. Now Muhammed was the final messenger, and he was preaching the truth: Allah had called him to preach Islam, and it would conquer the world.

To justify his message, Muhammed needed an authority greater than his own word. This authority, known as the Qur'an, was composed of the "revelations" he directly received from Allah and recorded.

The Sacred Book Mistaken

Muhammed's handling of Scripture in the 7th century is much like that of Mormon leaders Joseph Smith and Brigham Young in the 19th century. Both Mormonism and Islam borrowed parts of the Bible they liked, discarded or changed others, turned Jesus into a prophet, consigned women to an eternity of sexual slavery, and made salvation entirely works-related. Thus, as this week's title affirms, Islam might be thought of as a type of medieval Mormonism.

Witnessing Tip-Establish the Bible's Authority

If you have the opportunity to discuss the issue of authority and truth with a Muslim, explain why the Bible can be trusted as the inspired Word of God (see 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 1:24-25). Provide prophetic evidence that Jesus is the Messiah (see Ps. 22:13-18; 110:1; Isa. 9:6-7; 53:5-8; Mic. 5:2). Show Islamic evidence of the Bible's truth (see Surah 5:43-44, 46:5-68; 10:64).

Witnessing Tip-Demonstrate Christian Love

Believers are challenged by the spread of Islam, but we are not at war with Muslims. Our attitude must be love and acceptance, because God accepts and loves people as they are and wants them to enter a relationship with Him (see 2 Pet. 3:9). Against love there is no defense. Therefore, be sure that the love of Christ is your motive in reaching Muslims with the gospel (see John 3:16; Acts 17). Ministry is an excellent way to express the love of Jesus.

Islamic laws affect all areas of Muslim life. Foods are divided into *halal* (lawful), *haram* (forbidden), and *mushbooh* (questionable). Dress is to be modest, with men avoiding gold-colored clothing and women wearing the veil (*hijab*). A man is allowed to have up to four wives, but he must provide for them. He is allowed to beat them as a last resort (see Surah 4:34).

The Five Pillars of Islam

1. **Kalima.** The confession "There is no god but Allah, Muhammed is the messenger of Allah."
2. **Salat.** Prayer five times daily facing Mecca
3. **Zakat.** Almsgiving of 1/40 of income
4. **Sawm.** Fasting during the month of Ramadan
5. **Hajj.** The pilgrimage to Mecca, made once in a lifetime

Culture Clash-A Peaceful Religion?

Airliners flown into buildings, ritualistic beheadings broadcast on Arabic television, calls for continued *jihad*--these come only from extremist fundamentalists, say many Muslim leaders who insist Islam is a peaceful religion. Yet a password-protected Arabic Web site has about 40 different discussion threads berating individual Christians, making threatening statements about them, posting pictures and address information on them, or seeking information with the hopes of tracking them down.

The more notorious definition of *jihad* is corporate *jihad*--warfare against infidels (*akafir*). We see awful images of women being killed by their own family members in honor killings. We see Christian slaughtered. Corporate *jihad* is a central tenet of Islam, regardless of what modern redactors say.

There is little substantiation for the position that Islam is a religion of peace. In 1300 years Islam has never peacefully coexisted with other faiths in any country where the Muslim population was in the majority. Even though Turkey is used as an example of this peaceful coexistence, churches throughout the country are routinely closed or burned.

In the following sections from the Qur'an, underline words and phrase that command violent acts of *jihad*.

Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which has been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth, from among the People of the Book [Jews and Christians], until they pay compensation with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued (Surah 9:29)

Witnessing Tip-Build on Respect for Jesus

Muslims have great respect for Jesus as a prophet of God. He is mentioned 97 times in the Qur'an, which affirms His supernatural birth, life of miracles, compassion, and ascension to heaven. However, Muslims do not accept Jesus as the Son of God. Explain Jesus' eternal nature and sonship, emphasizing that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit without physical relations with Mary. As God in the flesh, He died on the cross to pay for humanity's sin and rose from the dead in power and victory.

How can anyone possibly keep all of Allah's laws? No one can. Even though Muslims deny that people inherit a sinful nature, they understand that people sin because of weakness or error. These sins work against the faithful Muslim's good works. When considering the Muslim salvation, keep this reality in mind: *Muslims live and die by scales. They must do more good than bad to make it into heaven.*

Witnessing Tip-Show Sensitivity

Be aware that many Muslims believe that all Americans are Christians. Because American society is immoral, they believe that all Christians are immoral. Your Christlike lifestyle can prove otherwise. State your belief in high moral standards. Be sensitive to Muslim cultural teachings. For example, a

Muslim man may resist a witness from a woman. Muslims may be uncomfortable attending a Bible study if pictures of Jesus are on the walls.

Confronting the Truth

The Bible affirms that Jesus is much more than a prophet. He was supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit and was Born of the virgin Mary. Jesus was God’s unique Son. During His earthly ministry He carried out His Father’s will. He died on a cross as the sacrifice for the sins of the world, was raised from the dead, and is exalted at the right hand of the Father in heaven. Jesus provides salvation for all who repent of their sins and confess Him as Lord. Because His blood atoned for sin, salvation is a gift of grace through faith in Jesus Christ (see Eph. 2:8-10). Contrary to Muslim practice, it is impossible to earn salvation by good works or by religious deeds and exercises.

A Comparison of Beliefs		
	Christianity	Islam
God	One triune God who is personal and knowable.	Allah is absolutely one. Not triune. Not personal.
Jesus	Unique Son of God who provided salvation through atoning death and resurrection.	Prophet. Not God's Son
Source of Authority	Bible is divinely inspired and preserved and contains perfect instruction and truth.	The Qur'an is Allah's exact words.
Humanity	Made in God's image but sinful by nature.	No sinful nature. Born pure. Basically religious.
Sin	Sinful nature and choices are humanity's problem.	Breaking Allah's law and not doing His will are sin.
Salvation	Accepting God's gift of forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ.	Based on Allah's will. Pursued by conforming to Five Pillars.