

# Christianity and Islam: Common Misconceptions Explained

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Recent demographic projections show the number of Muslims in the United States will double over the next twenty years.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that by the year 2030 one out of four people on earth will be Muslim.<sup>2</sup> Muslims actively proselytize biblically indifferent and secular societies, presenting Islam as a viable faith system, superior to Christianity. In light of Islam's rapid growth and rising profile, Christians should prepare not only to win Muslim neighbors to Jesus Christ, but also to compete against them for the souls of a non-religious population.

While the presence of Islam has become more accepted among the media and our neighbors, very few facts about the religion have been accurately portrayed to the masses. Attempts to reconcile Islam and Christianity in an effort to promote tolerance and peace have only resulted in misconceptions regarding both religions. But by studying the holy books of each faith – the Bible and the Qur'an – the misconceptions can be explained.

## **Misconception 1: Islam means "peace"**

One of the great challenges American Muslims face in leading Westerners to accept Islam are the numerous reports of daily global violence perpetrated in the name of Allah.<sup>3</sup> Some respond that a few radicals and extremists have hijacked an otherwise peaceful religion. It has been popularly stated that Islam is actually a religion of peace and tolerance – that Islam means "peace." Yet, one can discover from the Qur'an that Islam is not defined as "peace." In fact, Islam means submission.

**"Today the unbelievers have lost every hope of (despoiling) your creed; so do not fear them, fear Me. Today I have perfected your system of belief and bestowed My favors upon you in full, and have chosen submission (al-Islam) as the creed for you," Surah 5:3.**<sup>4</sup>

"The term Islam in the lexicon of the Arabs means 'Submission.' The religion of Islam is the religion of submission to the will of the omnipotent and omniscient Creator, the only God, who admits of no associates in the worship of Him."<sup>5</sup> A Muslim is one who submits and confesses that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet (Surah 22:78). Muslims believe that Muhammad was the final messenger from Allah and Islam was the final religion for mankind, revealed through Muhammad and recorded in the Qur'an. If an individual desires peace in this life and paradise in the next, then they too must submit to Allah. Islam is the path of submission.

The Qur'an states that there is no compulsion in religion (Surah 2:256). That seems tolerant and peaceful. However, it also authorizes Muslims to forcibly coerce non-Muslims into submission.

**"O believers, fight the unbelievers around you, and let them realize that you are firm: Remember, God is with those who are pious and obedient to Him," Surah 9:123.**

**"Enjoined on you is fighting, and this you abhor. You may dislike a thing yet it may be good for you; or a thing may haply please you but may be bad for you. Only God has knowledge, and you do not know," Surah 2:216.**

In fact, there are over 100 "war verses" in the Qur'an authorizing Muslims to take up arms against infidels.<sup>6</sup> Today, individual Muslims must decide how they will interpret and obey these clear statements – whether literally or allegorically. What is beyond dispute is that the Qur'an explicitly authorizes conquer-to-convert tactics, and historically, submission by the sword has been practiced.<sup>7</sup>

**"The punishment for those who wage war against God and His Prophet, and perpetrate disorders in the land, is to kill or hang them, or have a hand on one side and a foot on the other cut off, or banish them from the land. Such is their disgrace in this world, and in the Hereafter their doom shall be dreadful. But those who repent before they are subdued should know that God is forgiving and kind," Surah 5:33-34.**

### **Misconception 2: Both the Bible and the Qur'an direct violence against non-believers**

Current terrorist activities perpetrated by some Muslims have been justified by pointing to the Inquisition or the Crusades and reasoning that Christianity has produced its fair share of militants, too. Some atheists even argue that all religion is inherently bad because it leads to bloodshed. This misconception suggests that both the Bible and the Qur'an promote violence in the name of religion. This is not so.

First, faulty comparisons are alleged between the Qur'an's violent precepts and the Old Testament record of the kingdom of Israel. For instance, the Qur'an's immediate dictates are likened to Joshua's campaign to dispossess the Canaanites of their land (Joshua 23:3-13) or King Saul's attempted genocide of Amalek (1 Samuel 15). There is a significant difference though. When God sent Joshua or Saul to attack another nation, it was a judgment upon that nation – not a call for repentance or conversion. The time for repentance had passed and the cup of retribution was full (Genesis 15:16). Joshua or Saul was God's instrument of retribution and they did not give ultimatums to their enemies – convert and become Israelites or die. Yet that's exactly what Muhammad's *Jihad* does. Islam's enemies can stop the violence by submitting to Islam (Surah 5:34).

**“But when these months, prohibited (for fighting), are over, slay the idolaters wheresoever you find them, and take them captive or besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every likely place. But if they repent and fulfill their devotional obligations and pay the zakat, then let them go their way, for God is forgiving and kind,” Surah 9:5.**

Second, there is no comparison at all between the Qur'an's “war verses” and the New Testament of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” and “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here” (Matthew 26:52; John 18:36).<sup>8</sup> The historical atrocity of the Inquisition (or the like) exemplifies Christian adherents defying their authoritative scriptures. Roman Catholic Popes usurped biblical authority to muster corporeal forces. There is no New Testament command or precedent for such. But the ongoing violence perpetrated by Muslims against “infidels” today accords with the Qur'an (Surah 9:29).

The Qur'an authorizes corporeal violence against non-believers. The New Testament does not.

### **Misconception 3: Allah is simply another name for the God of the Bible**

It is popularly assumed that Islam's Allah is the same being called Yahweh or Jehovah in the Bible, just known by a different name. In fact, the Qur'an teaches this continuity. Islam's message is that the same God had given the Old Law, the Gospel and the Qur'an. However, Jews and Christians (“People of the Book”) had corrupted Islam and changed their scriptures, necessitating Allah to choose Muhammad as his final prophet and correctly teach Islam, one last time.

**“Do not argue with the people of the Book unless in a fair way, apart from those who act wrongly, and say to them: ‘We believe what has been sent down to you. Our God and your God is one, and to Him we submit,’” Surah 29:46.**

Muslims believe that the religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam serve the same Allah, but only Muslims serve him according to the true book – the Qur'an. Yet upon study, Allah is not the same god as one finds in the Bible. It is no more correct to call the biblical God, Allah, than calling Him Zeus, Vishnu, or Baal! They are different gods and these differences far exceed semantics.

These gods have different natures. Islam teaches that there is no triune nature or Godhead.

**“So believe in God and His apostles, and do not call Him ‘Trinity.’ Abstain from this for your good; for God is only one God, and far from His glory is it to beget a son. All that is in the heavens and the earth belongs to Him; and sufficient is God for all help,” Surah 4:171b**

Yet the Bible reveals the Godhead (Romans 1:20). The Father is called God (1 Corinthians 1:3). Jesus Christ is called God (Titus 2:13). The Holy Spirit is called God (Acts 5:3-4). There are biblical expressions of the triune nature (Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 13:14). The Qur'an denies a son of God (Surah 17:111). There's no place for God the Holy Spirit in Islam. Allah is not just another name for the God of the Bible. Such contradictory natures show they are different beings.

Furthermore, these gods have different affections. The Bible says that God is love (1 John 4:8). He initiated love (1 John 4:10, 19). One of the amazing truths of the gospel is that God loved us despite our sins and invites us to become part of His spiritual family – children of God (1 John 3:1)!

Allah does not reveal himself as love. He is not *agape*. Rather the Qur'an shows many people whom Allah does not love.

**“...and God does not love the ungrateful and sinners,” Surah 2:276.**

**“Say: ‘Obey God and His Messenger;’ and if they refuse (then remember) God does not love disbelievers,” Surah 3:32**

**“...but God does not love the unjust,” Surah 3:57.**

Traditionally, Muslims hold that there are 99 beautiful names for Allah in the Qur'an. Yet “Father” is not among them. Allah is no one's father. Muslims are not, and cannot hope to be, children of Allah. Allah does not love first and he does not love unconditionally. Islam's message for humanity is: you start loving Allah and serving Allah and then he'll favor you. Such fundamentally different affections show they are different beings.

#### **Misconception 4: Muslims believe in Jesus, too**

Some are surprised to find that Jesus is mentioned in the Qur'an. Jesus appears in about 90 *ayah* of the Qur'an.<sup>9</sup> Of these passages, 64 of them retell the virgin birth account, basically leaving 26 verses to craft the Qur'an's version of Jesus. Thus Muslims trying to educate their neighbors about Islam may state, “Jesus was a Muslim and a great prophet,” “We honor Jesus (peace be upon him),” and “We believe in Jesus, too.” But Muslims believe in the Jesus revised by the Qur'an, not the Jesus revealed in the Bible.

What does the Qur'an say about Jesus? “With respect to form, the references to Jesus in the Qur'an can be divided into four groups: (1) birth and infancy stories, (2) miracles, (3) conversations between Jesus and God or between Jesus and the Israelites, and (4) divine pronouncements on his humanity, servanthood, and place in the prophetic line which stipulate that ‘fanatical’ opinions about him must be abandoned.”<sup>10</sup> According to the Qur'an, a fanatical opinion would be faith that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (Matthew 16:16; John 11:27).

**“O people of the Book, do not be fanatical in your faith, and say nothing but the truth about God. The Messiah who is Jesus, son of Mary, was only an apostle of God, and a command of His which He sent to Mary, as a mercy from Him,” Surah 4:171.**

Not only is the good confession “fanatical,” but it is considered *shirk* in Islam. *Shirk* is the unforgivable sin of ascribing companions or partners to Allah. Furthermore, to accept the biblical doctrine of Godhead or confess that Jesus is Lord is *shirk*.<sup>11</sup>

**“They are surely infidels who say: ‘God is the Christ, son of Mary.’ But the Christ had only said: ‘O children of Israel, worship God, who is my Lord and your Lord.’ Whosoever associates a compeer with God, will have Paradise denied to him by God, and his abode shall be Hell; and the sinners will have none to help them,” Surah 5:72**

**“The Christians say: ‘Christ is the Son of God.’ That is what they say with their tongues following assertions made by unbelievers before them. May they be damned by God: How perverse are they!” Surah 9:30.**

Thus, the Muslim Jesus is not the Lord. He was a Jewish prophet that Allah sent to the Israelites to teach them Islam. So, in the Qur'an, Jesus was a specially created being, like Adam (Surah 3:59), who was born of a virgin named Mary (Surah 3:47). He never accepted worship from men (Surah 5:72, 117; 19:36), denied the triune nature of God (Surah 5:116-117; 4:171), and never claimed to be God or the son of God (Surah 5:72). Finally, the Qur'an denies that Jesus was crucified (Surah 4:156-158). The Muslim Jesus did not die on Calvary, nor was he resurrected on the third day. The Jesus that Muslims claim to honor is not Jesus Christ – they neither know nor believe in the biblical Jesus.

#### **Misconception 5: Islam offers a savior**

Some folks mistakenly think that Jesus Christ and Muhammad correlate (roughly) for their respective religions. They believe Muhammad is to Islam as Jesus Christ is to Christianity. This is not so.

The prophet Muhammad is not a savior. He does not claim to be. He claimed to be a prophet and a warner. He was an authoritarian demanding submission to his dictates. Yet Muhammad did not sacrifice himself to save or redeem anyone. Jesus Christ did.

There is no savior in Islam. Each Muslim must save himself. It is truly a religion of works where each is taught that he must do more good deeds over the course of his life than bad. Otherwise, he will burn in Hell. The Qur'an states:

**“Remember that good deeds nullify the bad,” Surah 11:114.**

“Muhammad’s teaching on the Final Judgment is that a Muslim will have all the deeds of his life placed before him on a giant scale – good deeds on one side and evil deeds on the other... Here’s the catch, the Qur’an does not reveal how much any deed weighs. How good is good enough?... No one knows.”<sup>12</sup> The Qur’an speaks of only one sure way a Muslim can skip those scales of Judgment and assure himself an eternal abode in Paradise: death in *Jihad*.

**“If you are killed in the cause of God or you die, the forgiveness and mercy of God are better than all that you amass. And if you die or are killed, even so it is to God that you will return,” Surah 3:157-158.**

**“And those who were deprived of their homes or banished in My cause, and who fought and were killed, I shall blot out their sins and admit them indeed into gardens with rippling streams,” Surah 3:195**

This is the end of a man-made religion, a religion without a savior. Their “hope” for eternal life is found in the utter despair of suicide. Today, many terrorist activities are the actions of both desperate and devout men who read their Qur’an and realize that there is no savior for them.

But there is a savior! He is found in the Bible. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the good news of a merciful God who graciously offers His Son as a savior for sinners. The true path is the Gospel – that’s God’s power for salvation (Romans 1:16). When people believe and obey the gospel, God washes away sin and they are born again to the hope of heaven based on God’s promise.

The Bible shows that sin is overcome by the savior, Jesus Christ. It is forgiven in Christ. Sin cannot be worked off. Nowhere in the Bible does one read that the wages of sin is community service: “Do a good deed (or 3 or 4 as the case may be) to make up for your transgression.” Rather, Scripture says good works alone are a poor, ragged, and inadequate covering for sins (Isaiah 64:5-6). So sin cannot be worked off by sinners. Sin is a terrible rebellion before a Holy God that must be paid for and the just payment for sin is death (Romans 6:23). Surely the sinner will die and know the eternal torment of Hell for offending the righteous and holy God, unless God graciously provides another to die for the sin and save the sinner. That is exactly what He did at the cross of Jesus Christ.

Not only did Jesus die on the cross to pay for the sins of sinners but He rose again and gained victory over death itself (1 Corinthians 15:1-8). The victorious Jesus Christ – the savior, mediator, intercessor – offers salvation freely to all (1 Timothy 2:5; Romans 3:26; Mark 10:45). Indeed, the gospel is for all, calling all men to Jesus Christ (Mark 16:15-16; 2 Thessalonians 2:14).

But how does one respond to the salvation offer? Indeed the one savior has revealed His one way of salvation (John 14:6). (1) Faith in the gospel predicated by the word of God (Romans 10:17; John 3:16). (2) Faith is perfected in obedience to the gospel (John 14:15, 21; 15:14; James 2:22). Specifically, the word of Truth tells believers to repent of their sinful life (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38), confess their faith and allegiance to Jesus (Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:36-38), and be immersed in water (baptism) for the remission of sins and entrance into the body of Christ (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Galatians 3:27). Now a sinner is converted to a saint and a son, a child of God (Galatians 3:26-27; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 John 3:1-2).

Muslims (and others not in Jesus Christ) need to hear that there is a savior. He offers forgiveness and hope and the promise of eternal life. Jesus calls us by the gospel, found in the Bible, to have salvation. How will you respond?

<sup>1</sup> Grossman, Cathy Lynn. “Number of U.S. Muslims to Double.” *USA Today*. January 27, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.thereligionofpeace.com>. Accessed April 24, 2012.

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- <sup>4</sup> Ali, Orooj Ahmed. *Al-Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- <sup>5</sup> Farah, Caesar E. *Islam, Sixth Edition*. Hauppauge, NY: Barron's Educational Series, 2000. P.3
- <sup>6</sup> See Richardson, Don. *Secrets of the Koran*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2003. P.253-254.
- <sup>7</sup> See Spencer, Robert. *The Truth about Muhammad*. Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2006. P.89-168.
- <sup>8</sup> *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1982.
- <sup>9</sup> Lutzer, Erwin. *Slandering Jesus: Six Lies People Tell about the Man Who Said He Was God*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishing, 2007. P.39-40.
- <sup>10</sup> Khalidi, Tarif. *The Muslim Jesus*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001. P.14
- <sup>11</sup> See Roberts, Andrew. *Night and Day: A Comparative Study of Christianity and Islam*. Summitville, IN: Spiritbuilding Publishing, 2005. P.89-91
- <sup>12</sup> Roberts, Andrew. "Christianity Can Survive the Threat of Islam." *Can Christianity Survive in America?* ed. Mike Willis. Bowling Green, KY: Truth Books, 2011. P.259