

Muslim and Christians - Not the Same Jesus

By Mark Roberts

Imagine for a moment a person who believes George Armstrong Custer won the Battle of Little Bighorn. Somehow this person has come to believe all kinds of wrong information about Custer. He says Custer fought for the Confederacy, had red hair, and defeated Crazy Horse at Little Bighorn. Despite all these factual gaps he then announces "I believe in Custer." What do we make of this?

It would be true that this individual shares some things in common with those who believe in the real George Custer. However, this person does not believe in the real Custer. If he were to talk with a historian his announcement of "I believe in Custer too" would be absurd, if not almost offensive.

It has become quite common since 9-11 for Muslims to stress points of similarity and contact between Islam and Christianity. Many Muslims want to confuse Allah with the God of the Bible, Jehovah. Muslims want to say they believe in the Bible, just like Christians. We'll leave those points for future consideration, choosing here instead to discuss what it means when a Muslim says "We believe in Jesus too." Do Muslims really believe in the Christ of the Bible?

In an article in the *Dallas Morning News* titled "Among Muslims Jesus is a Prophet with Honor" Musammil H. Siddiqi wants to say "Yes." He is clear that Muslims do not believe all the same things about Jesus but he still wants Christians to know that Muslims believe in Jesus. Is this true?

Absolutely not. The person Muslims respect and honor is the Quran's Jesus, a Jesus that is only a shadow of the Christ of the New Testament. In the Quran Jesus does miracles and is a prophet. However, and significantly, He is not deity, He is not God's Son, and He does not die for the sins of the world. The Quran teaches Jesus was not even actually crucified.

With these disparities how then can Muslims say they believe in Jesus? To say such is to terribly misunderstand what Christians believe Jesus taught and whom Christians believe Jesus is. Siddiqi's article even goes so far as to say that Jesus' message "was basically the same as the message of other prophets" Again, this is simply wrong. Jesus' message was that He was the divine Son of God, and that if people did not accept Him as such they would be lost (John 8:24). Jesus was not content to be labeled just another prophet but demanded recognition as deity (Matthew 16:13ff), and even accepted worship (see Luke 24:52; John 9:38). Jesus saw His death as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of all humanity (Matthew 26:28) and predicted His resurrection from the dead as the ultimate sign that He is God's Son (John 2:18-21; Matt. 12:39-40; Luke 11:32). This is the Jesus of the New Testament and this is the Jesus of Christianity. He is so different from Islam's Jesus that about all the two figures have in common is the name "Jesus." Muslims simply do not believe in Jesus *the Christ*.

There are two sad ramifications of Muslim's attempt to pretend they believe in the same Jesus as Christians do. First, it results in a complete misunderstanding of Islamic-Christian relations. Siddiqi's article says "*As we both love Jesus, let us love and care for one another.*"

Siddiqi, like many today, seem to think that Muslims and Christians can only treat each other with decency and respect if we see how similar our beliefs are. Yet the truth is there is an unbridgeable chasm between Christianity and Islam, a gulf that centers on the identity of Jesus. It is crucial, however, to realize that such does not mean Christians cannot treat Muslims kindly. The basis of Christian ethics is not “Your beliefs are kind of like mine so I’ll be nice to you.” The basis of Christianity is the commands of the Christ to love even our enemies (Matt. 5:44), and to treat all men as we wish to be treated (Matthew 7:12). Thus, even if I encounter someone with a belief system radically different from mine, one that I find even offensive and blasphemous, I must treat that person with dignity and respect *because the Son of God commands me to do so*. If we teach people that we only have to be nice to those who believe like we do then we are all headed for trouble when Christians and Muslims (correctly) realize their respective faiths are not anything alike!

The other terrible result of this “mash all religions together into one pot” kind of thinking is that it quashes discussions of faith and differences in faith. Several years ago I met a Muslim teacher in a formal debate on the subject of Jesus’ deity. I was thankful that he did not buy into this “let’s all pretend that we mostly agree on Jesus” line. Instead, he boldly, kindly and forcefully advanced the evidences for Islam’s conclusions about Jesus. I did the same in the name of Christianity and the New Testament. The evening was not caustic or abusive, but thought-provoking and challenging. The many Muslims I talked with afterward thanked me for having the courage of my convictions, asked me good questions and talked of how they would have to think further about what I had taught. It was a delightful experience that showed people can disagree without being disagreeable. Instead of pretending we agreed about Jesus we focused on the differences and presented our cases, leaving the audience to consider and think further about what is surely a crucial issue: who is Jesus? Pretending Muslims believe in Jesus may be politically correct and it certainly pays homage to the god of toleration, but it destroys the imperative for real religious discussion. Instead of watering down our convictions let us have the courage to kindly and in an appropriate way and time speak of what we really believe. True faith demands no less.

George Armstrong Custer lost the Battle of the Little Bighorn. To pretend otherwise is foolish. Likewise, I could say that I believe in Mohammed, for I do believe he is a historical person. Yet my statement about Mohammed is not anything akin to what Muslims mean when they say they believe in Mohammed, is it? Similarly Muslims can say they believe in Jesus, but they do not believe in the Christ of the New Testament. Instead of glossing over our differences let us see them for what they are: worthy of study, discussion and thought, but far too important to paint over in the name of toleration for each other.