

# 9/11 and You

My sister had a 9:00 a.m. appointment at the World Trade Center.

On September 12.

Since September 11, 2001, I've often wondered what might have happened had her appointment been a day earlier or the terrorist attacks a day later. I could have been walking the streets of New York City with her picture.

What were your feelings that tragic day? Shock? Fear? Anger? Confusion? Sadness? How do you process those feelings now, as reminders of the attacks come in anniversary commemorations and media coverage? Nearly two-thirds of American Red Cross 9/11 adult counselees still grieve, according to a study of those directly affected by the attacks<sup>{1}</sup>.

## “I Hate You!”

In the immediate aftermath, my feelings of sadness blended with intense hostility. Once when Osama Bin Laden's face appeared on television, I spontaneously shouted, “I hate you!”

I was and am a follower of Jesus. He taught his followers to “love your enemies.”<sup>{2}</sup> Why was I yelling “I hate you!” to a picture on a TV screen?

I wondered why this guy hated my sister. If Deborah Wright had been among the victims, her death would have been included among those he applauded. If I had been a victim, he would have applauded mine. I wrote a radio series on “[Why Radical Muslims Hate You](#)” to discover historical, socio-cultural, political, religious, and psychological roots of such anger. It helped me to connect with Muslims who shared similar concerns but disavowed the radical methods.

## Dust of Death

Deborah's experience as a corporate chaplain took her back to New York to help WTC-based companies and their employees who suffered loss on 9/11 cope with the emotional and spiritual whirlwinds their worlds had become. Many suffered from survivor guilt. Failure to process grief could lead to serious consequences. Some firemen, for instance, were assigned to look after widows of fallen comrades. "There can be enormous intimacy and bonding in shared grief," Deborah notes. "Some of the firemen and widows ended up in bed together."

Some competitive, driven businesspersons re-examined their rat race—making big bucks and accumulating the most toys—and asked, "Is that all there is?". Long looks at corporate culture prompted many to consider spiritual realities.

Part of helping survivors process their experiences involved taking them to Ground Zero. Deborah comments, "As I stood at Ground Zero and picked up the dust, I could not help but think that we were standing in a giant crematorium. The ground seemed hallowed to me."

## Personal Lessons from 9/11

What personal 9/11 lessons persist? Perhaps you can relate to these that seem poignant to me:

*We live in a contingent universe.* Human decisions and actions have consequences, often for good or evil.

*Life is temporary.* One early spiritual leader wrote of our lives' fleeting nature, "You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away."[\[3\]](#)

*Link with the eternal.* Jesus of Nazareth, whom people of diverse spiritual persuasions respect as a great teacher, told a friend grieving her brother's death, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die

like everyone else, will live again. They are given eternal life for believing in me and will never perish.”[\[4\]](#)

*Cherish your friends.* In the aftermath of 9/11, many friendships were deepened as people linked with each other for encouragement, solace and support.

*Understand and love your enemies and intellectual adversaries.* Support national defense, but learning about state enemies can help communication with moderates who share some of their convictions. Getting to know neighbors or associates with whom you differ politically, philosophically or spiritually can help build bridges that foster civility in public discourse.

## Notes

1. Amy Westfeldt, “Study: Sept. 11 Survivors Still Grieving,” Associated Press, May 26, 2006, on AOL News. Also see full Red Cross report, <http://www.redcross.org/images/pdfs/SRPClientSurvey.pdf>, p. v.
2. Matthew 5:44 NASB.
3. James 4:14 NASB.
4. John 11:25 NLT.

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# Breaching the Barriers of Islam: Sharing Christ with

# Muslims

*Steve Cable writes that Christ-followers can use some intriguing verses in the Koran as a way to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to Muslims.*

## Barriers to Islamic Evangelism

Even in these tense times, we can be confident that God loves the followers of Islam and desires for them to receive redemption through Jesus Christ. Paul writes in First Timothy, “[God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:3). However, many Christians feel like the gulf is too wide and the walls are too high to share the truth with Muslims. Yet, our God is a “rewarder of those who seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6), working in providential ways to make truth known.

In this article, we will discuss one way God is breaching the barriers of Islam. Let’s begin by looking at the very real barriers to Islamic evangelism.

The first decade of the twenty-first century is becoming known for the greatest clash between the Western world and Islam since the Crusades. The recent furor over cartoons showing caricatures of Mohammed is a violent example of the chasm. This radical fanaticism is an extreme expression of the barriers that have existed for centuries as Christians have tried to share their faith with followers of Islam. Around the globe, missionaries have typically seen fewer converts from Islam than from other religions. Let’s consider a few of the bricks from which this barrier is constructed:

- *The higher way syndrome—According to Islam, earlier prophets such as Moses and Jesus brought truth from God, but over time their followers corrupted God’s true intent. Mohammed came to correct those perversions. Therefore, the*

*Bible has been corrupted and is no longer reliable*

- *The final word—Mohammed is the last of the prophets; there can be no further revelation. Questioning the meaning of the Koran as held by the local Imam is strictly prohibited*
- *The greater reward—Zeal and strict adherence to the tenets of Islam will result in great rewards in paradise. A zealous Muslim will be proselytizing others, not allowing someone to try to convert him.*

These first three bricks share much in common with reasons why it should be hard to convert a devout Christian to another world religion. But Islam adds a fourth brick that is distinctly different:

- *The ultimate penalty—As reported by Ibn Warraq, “It is quite clear that under Islamic law, an apostate must be put to death. . . . If [even] a pubescent boy apostatizes, he is imprisoned until he comes of age, when if he persists in rejecting Islam, he must be put to death.”[\[1\]](#) The death penalty for conversion certainly puts a damper on openness to considering the claims of other religions.*

These bricks and others build a solid fortress making it difficult for evangelism among Muslims.

## **Once More into the Breach**

Even though certain aspects of Islam create a formidable wall for those desiring to share Christ, God has equipped us for “the destruction of fortresses . . . and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor. 10:4). As David Garrison reports, “More Muslims have come to Christ in the past two decades than at any other time in history.[\[2\]](#)”

Before modern artillery, a high, thick wall was an effective fortress. If the fortress was well supplied or time was a critical factor for the attacking army, a breach had to be created in the wall through artillery or siege works. The first group of troops to enter the breach would take on the brunt of the fortress's defenses and suffer extremely heavy casualties. During the Napoleonic wars, the British army called the first attackers the Forlorn Hope, offering promotions to any survivors. Shakespeare honored the Forlorn Hope in "King Henry V" as Henry rallied his troops shouting *"once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more, or close the wall up with our English dead!"* [\[3\]](#)

Is it possible that a Forlorn Hope entering a God-given breach in the barriers of Islam could spread the light of the gospel in an Islamic country?

In a South Asian country, Abdul, a teenager, was expelled from his Islamic school for asking too many questions about the Koran. Because of Islamic law, he was held as a captive by his family and condemned to death upon coming of age. Secretly freed by his mother, he fled from his home. A chance encounter with a Christian missionary as he walked a country road dramatically changed his life. The missionary showed such love and concern that Abdul had to touch him to assure himself that this was a man and not an angel. Abdul gave his life to Christ and was baptized. Abdul was one of a handful of converts from Islam witnessed by this missionary over a period of thirty years.

Banished from his home, Abdul spent several years studying and growing in his faith in another part of the country. Led by God to return to his village, Abdul took up residence in the home of a childhood friend as he was still banished by his family. After a few months of studying the Koran and the Bible, his friend was ready to be baptized. When his family learned about it, they rounded up the villagers, took Abdul to the local soccer field and proceeded to beat him. Left for

dead, his friend came to his aid and Abdul survived. When Abdul baptized his friend, he prayed "Thank you, God for my friend. Yesterday, I was the only believer in this village. Today there are two. Tomorrow, there can be two hundred if it is your will."

Within a few years, all 1,800 people in Abdul's village became Christians including those who left him for dead. These new believers were discipled and more villages were touched. Since that time, over 500,000 Muslim background believers have joined in following Jesus Christ. This unprecedented response also resulted in the murder of Abdul's friend by Islamic radicals. Their willingness to act as the Forlorn Hope, entering the breach with no regard for their own lives, was a central part of this wonderful awakening.

## **The Breach in the Barrier**

What was the breach in the fortress of Islam allowing the message of Christ to be heard? Remember Abdul used the Koran and the Bible to bring his friend to faith. The breach in the barrier is the Koran itself. According to others working in Abdul's country, "Good Muslims have been taught from childhood that the Koran is the only true word of God. They may not know the meaning of the Koran's text, but nonetheless, they believe it is true. When approached with the Bible, Muslims immediately become defensive, but they cannot and will not deny the Koran. Relating to a Muslim from the Koran guarantees a listening ear." [{4}](#)

Many Muslims do not know that the following assertions appear in the Koran:

- If you are in doubt about the truth, ask those who read the Scripture that came before you. [{5}](#)
- To be a proper Muslim, one must read the Before Books (the Old and New Testaments). [{6}](#)

- Christians are humble and compassionate and know the truth when they hear it.[{7}](#)
- Those who observe the teaching of the Torah and the Gospels will go to heaven.[{8}](#)
- Mohammed states he is not the greatest prophet, he does not know what will happen to his followers (after death) and he is only a Warner.[{9}](#)
- Jesus knows the way to Allah.[{10}](#)

The strongest passage to foster a discussion about Jesus is Surah Al-Imran 3:42-55. This passage states:

- Mary was chosen by God,
- Jesus was born of a virgin,
- Jesus is the Messiah,
- Jesus has power over death, and
- Jesus knows the way to heaven.

An honest, open reading raises “Jesus from ‘Prophet’ status closer to ‘Savior’ status.”[{11}](#) For example verse 3:45 reads, “O Maryam! Allah gives you the good news . . . that you will be given a son; his name will be Messiah, Isa the son of Maryam.”[{12}](#) And 3:49 reads, “[Jesus] will heal the blind and the lepers, and raise the dead to life, by Allah’s leave.”[{13}](#) This passage clearly ascribes to Jesus a position and power that Mohammed does not ascribe to himself.

## **Don’t Misuse the Koran**

We rightfully accuse some cults of using proof texts from the Bible to promote distorted religions. Do the verses introduced above relate the overwhelming message of the Koran? Absolutely not. There are other passages which are critical of Christianity and particularly the idea that Jesus is “another God” apart from Allah. Lest we be guilty of “proof-texting,” someone approaching a Muslim with passages from the Koran must be clear on their objective. We should keep in mind four points:

- *Be humble. Freely admit that you are not an expert in the Koran. You want to understand how they view these passages.*
- *Be simple. Do not expound on the doctrine of the Koran or attribute inspiration to its teaching. Simply point out that the Koran seems to encourage Muslims to study our Bible and understand more about Jesus.*
- *Be sensitive. Don't think that you are going to use the Koran to lead someone to Christ. You are discussing the Koran to see if they are open to further exploration of Jesus' teaching.*
- *Be positive. People who have grown up studying the Koran have used this approach to bring hundreds of thousands of Muslims to faith in Christ over the last decade.*

In his book *Camel Training Manual*, Kevin Greeson points out that Paul's custom when entering a new area was to begin teaching Christ in the synagogue from their Scripture, the Old Testament. In a similar fashion, we can approach a Muslim with the question, "I have discovered an amazing truth in the Koran that gives hope of eternal life in heaven. Would you read this passage with me so that we can talk about it?" [\[14\]](#)

The purpose of this discussion is not to show how much you know about the Koran or how little they may know. In humility, the purpose is to ask them to consider the implications of this passage stating Jesus had authority over death and Jesus knows the way to heaven. They know these statements are true because they are in the Koran. If they are concerned about death and want to know the way to heaven, they may want to learn more about Jesus to follow the Koran's injunction to obey Jesus.

This teaching about Jesus is especially important in the light

of Surah The Chambers 46:9 which reads, "I [Mohammed] am no prodigy among the prophets; nor do I know what will be done with me or with you. I follow only what is revealed to me, and I am no more than a plain Warner." So, the Koran teaches Mohammed is a warner (calling people to fully obey God) while Jesus is the Messiah (knowing the way to God). A serious Muslim should have a desire to learn about Jesus.

## **A Person of Peace**

Please note that the purpose of discussing the Koran is not to teach someone how to receive God's free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. The purpose is to identify people who are open to learning more about Jesus. People whose hearts are prepared through diligently seeking to know God. In his book *Church Planting Movements*, Kevin Greeson refers to this as "finding a Person of Peace."

This term refers to Jesus sending seventy of the disciples ahead of Him to witness in every city and place where He was going. Jesus commanded the seventy, "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house.' If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you" (Luke 10:5-7). Jesus was telling them to use a non-threatening, culturally appropriate way to determine whether a person is open to learning more about Jesus. An open, interested person is a "person of peace" and you should invest your time in them. If they are not interested, then shake the dust from your feet and move on. It will only antagonize them and their community if you insist on forcing yourself upon them. Once an interest in knowing more about Jesus is confirmed, you set the Koran aside and turn to the Bible (the "Before Book" in Koran terminology) to teach them about Jesus and redemption.

One concern about sharing in this manner is the danger of producing a group of pseudo-believers who add a distorted view

of Christ to their religious practice without truly putting their faith in Christ. This danger is why the Koran must be viewed only as the breach getting you into the fortress. The Bible in the power of the Holy Spirit supplies the words that lead to salvation. Discipleship must be strictly based on the Bible.

In addition to the large numbers of conversions in Abdul's country, the level of commitment by these new believers is encouraging. In 2002, a team from a U.S. mission organization conducted an investigation of the churches resulting from this movement. They found that

- over 2/3 of the new converts had been active followers of Islam,
- less than 25% were mingling old Islamic beliefs with their new Christian ones, and
- less than 10% of the people know of any Christian returning to Islam. [{15}](#)

When Jesus told his followers to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19-20), He did not add a caveat excluding those hostile cultures with strong barriers to the truth. Instead, He promised to be with us and equip us with divinely powerful weapons to breach those fortresses. Hopefully, you are encouraged to reach out in love to Muslims as God brings them into your life. To learn more, take a look at the *Camel Training Manual* from WIGTake Resources. [{16}](#)

## Notes

1. Ibn Warraq, "Apostasy and Human Rights", *Free Inquiry*, February/March 2006, vol 26 No. 2.
2. *Church Planting Movements, How God Is Redeeming a Lost World*, David Garrison, WIFTake Resources, 2004.
3. *King Henry V*, William Shakespeare.
4. Kevin Greeson, *Camel Training Manual* (Midlothian: WIGTake Resources, 2004).

5. Koran Surah Jonah 10:94.
6. Koran Surah The Woman 4:136.
7. Koran Surah The Table Spread 5:82-83.
8. Koran Surah The Table Spread 5:65-66.
9. Koran Surah The Sandhills 46:9.
10. Koran Surah Al-Imran 3:42-55.
11. Greeson.
12. English translation of Muhammad Farooq-i-Azam Malik, *Al-Qur'an, The Guidance for Mankind* (Institute of Islamic Knowledge, 1997).
13. Ibid.
14. Greeson.
15. Garrison.
16. Available online at the Church Planting Movement's Web site at [www.churchplantingmovements.com/camel\\_training\\_manual.htm](http://www.churchplantingmovements.com/camel_training_manual.htm).

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## **“Mohammed and David Both Had Multiple Wives”**

Hi Pat,

I bought your [“Evidence and Answers” CD series](#) on Islam and listened to the first one today. I must say that it was very informative and enjoyable. In that particular broadcast, you contrasted Islam with Christianity by pointing out that Mohammed had eleven wives. However, the Bible records that

**King David, described as a man after God's own heart, also had numerous wives and concubines. Doesn't that nullify your argument with Mohammed somewhat?**

Great question. First, God's intent was for men to have one wife so David was out of God's will there, and the Bible shows He did not have a good home life. David was a man after God's heart but he was not sinless, he only was deeply committed to God. In Islam a qualification for a prophet is that he is sinless after his call. Muhammad is believed to be sinless; that is why this is a key point. David is not believed to be sinless but sincere; Muhammad is supposed to be sinless. The Koran limits men to four wives but Muhammad took several more. Also, Muhammad's youngest and most favorite wife Aisha was nine years old when they consummated their marriage. David did not marry a child but married women. Finally, Muhammad took his son-in-law's wife as one of his wives as well. So the character of Muhammad does not point to a sinless prophet.

Pat Zukeran

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## **“Should Our Kids to Be Required to Study Islam and Recite Islamic Prayers in School?”**

I recently stole a look into my nephew's high school history book. It has three chapters on Islam but only one mention of Jesus. Some parents are concerned that these kids are required

to read Islamic doctrine and recite Islamic prayers, which the teachers consider “education.” Yet Christianity is not taught because it violates the supposed separation of church and state. Is this not contrary to court decisions?

And since my nephew and my children attend church every Sunday and we are making every effort to raise our kids to be good Christians, is the school not violating our civil rights if they are required to recite Islamic prayers?

Actually the courts have supported teaching about religion as long as no proselytizing occurs. However, I am not aware of any laws that mandate equal time for the different faith systems. It would be helpful if the fans of multiculturalism promoted giving equal attention to the major world religions, but Christianity seems to be the only faith that often does not get a fair hearing.

Reciting prayers is definitely over the line; I would gently inform the teacher or administrator in charge that while you do not mind your child learning about other faith systems (preferably with Christianity getting equal time), forcing a child to pray definitely violates the restrictions established by the Supreme Court on prayer in school.

For Him,

Don Closson  
Probe Ministries

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**“Print the Truth About**

# Islam!"

I read your article [A Short Look at Six World Religions](#). Why are you lying to people about Islam? The prophet Muhammad himself is quoted to have said to his followers that even he would not enter paradise without the mercy of Allah, and the prophets were all free of any kind of sin. The word is composed of the Arabic words "Al" meaning "the" and "ilah" meaning "God." The word "Allah" means "the God," "the Creator," the only one worthy of worship. Who can help you except for the one who created the heavens and the earth? Who can hurt you except for the one who created the heavens and the earth? When Jesus, whom we love as one of our prophets known to us and Isa bin Maryam, Jesus the son of Mary was on the earth, drinking God's water and breathing God's air, who could have stopped God had He decided to destroy the earth including Jesus? Don't mix the creation and the Creator. Even the Christians cannot deny the singular power of Allah when they claim that He came in the form of Jesus (May Allah protect us from worshipping any figure of creation) Allah is one in control of everything. That belief may seem logical, but it is not a product of anybody's mind because the mind cannot create a reality that already exists. The identity of God for the creation is that of the creator. How can Allah be seen as distant when according to Islam, He is closer to you than your own jugular vein? Allah is said to have 70 times the love for His creation that a mother has for her child.

I am a white American and I am pleading to you out of brotherly love for you and the people you reach to get your facts straight and print the truth about Islam. Allah loves the believers who when they do wrong, they turn to Him in repentance, yet we all know that Allah does not like lying. The Word Islam means "submission." The way of all the prophets was submission to God. Noah (Nuh) preached submission to Allah, Moses (Musa) preached submission to Allah, and Jesus

(Isa) preached submission to Allah and all other of the 124,000 or more prophets between Adam and Muhammad came with submission to Allah. To become Muslim, we say “La ilaha il lala Muhammad ur-rasululah mean that “There is none worthy of worship except Allah and Muhammad is his final messenger.” Please come to Islam.

I think perhaps as a white American, you are infusing your understanding of Islam with concepts about the biblical God. In effect, you are borrowing aspects of the God of the Bible and applying them to Allah. Noah, Moses and Jesus did not preach submission to Allah; they preached about a RELATIONSHIP with Yahweh, who is not the same as Allah.

I am not lying to anyone about Islam. I think perhaps you are mistaken about both what I said and the nature of the one true God, whose name is “I AM,” and Who has also revealed Himself to be the loving Daddy (Abba) who is full of grace and truth. There is no grace in Allah. There is only the legalism of submission without personal intimacy.

You pleaded with me to come to Islam. I plead with you, please come to a PERSON—Jesus. He IS true Christianity.

Sue Bohlin  
Probe Ministries

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## **“My Boyfriend is Muslim”**

My best friend/boyfriend is Muslim. I have been brought up in a very Christian oriented family and have faith through Jesus Christ. My friend, has been attending church with me and at first was receptive to Christianity as he was overwhelmed with the amount of love in the church. He is very educated and does

a lot of reading. He has read several books about Christianity many of them pointing out flaws in the religion. And at the same time is searching to find out if Islam is right. As of now he is content that Islam is right due to its proofs through sciences. Are there any books that go through Koran or talk about who Muhammed really was that will help him to find the Lord? Also, what are good Christian books that I can point him to that would give him EVIDENCE – in Christianity.

First of all, let me encourage you that NOTHING you do or say will be as effective as your prayers on your boyfriend's behalf. That's where the real power is, OK?

Secondly, check out the website "Answering Islam," [www.answering-islam.org](http://www.answering-islam.org) . . . They really understand the different worldviews.

Third, I can't recommend strongly enough Lee Strobel's excellent books *The Case for Faith* and *The Case for Christ*. Mr. Strobel was a hardened atheist journalist who talked to a number of intelligent, articulate Christians who were able to "give an answer for the hope that is within," and he came to faith. Wonderful, wonderful books, but be sure to read them first so you can talk intelligently with your boyfriend.

Fourth, I say this as a Titus 2 woman (where God instructs the older women to teach the younger)—DON'T MARRY HIM! Scripture is very strong about believers not marrying unbelievers. I send this with a prayer that you will guard your heart and your sexual purity so that you do not find yourself so soul-connected to him that you feel you have to marry him to make things right. It's entirely possible that God wants to use you to draw your boyfriend to Himself, but don't cross over any lines that would compromise your obedience to God's best as revealed in His word, OK? (I say this as a mom who just saw my son marry a wonderful Christian girl who was worth waiting for and fighting the temptation to settle for less than God's best.)

So glad you wrote!!

Blessings,

Sue Bohlin  
Probe Ministries

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## **Why Radical Muslims Hate You (Short op-ed piece)**

If you are a Westerner, an American, a non-Muslim, or a Muslim of a different stripe than they, then some radical Muslims hate you.

Why? The complex answer involves history, culture, politics, religion and psychology. Of course, many—some would say most—Muslims are peace loving and deplore terrorism. Islam is quite diverse. Extremist Muslims do not represent all Muslims any more than white supremacists represent all Christians. Not all “radical” Muslims are violent or hateful. But understanding extremist Muslim hatred is essential to interpreting our post-9/11 world.

Osama Bin Ladin calls on Muslims to “obey God’s command to kill the Americans and plunder their possessions...to kill Americans and their allies, both civil and military...” He and his sympathizers want to eliminate Western influence and restore their version of Islam to the world.

Would you believe that dancing in American churches helped fuel some radical Muslim anger today? Princeton Near East scholar Bernard Lewis illustrates.

In 1948, Sayyid Qutb visited the United States for Egypt’s

Ministry of Education. His stay left him shocked with what he perceived as moral degeneracy and sexual promiscuity.

He wrote that even American religion was tainted by materialism and consumerism. Churches marketed their services to the public like merchants and entertainers. Success, big numbers, "fun" and having "a good time" seemed crucial to American churches.

He especially deplored clergy-sanctioned dances at church recreation halls. When the ministers lowered the lights, the dances became hot. Qutb's PG description: "The dance is inflamed by the notes of the gramophone...the dance-hall becomes a whirl of heels and thighs, arms enfold hips, lips and breasts meet, and the air is full of lust." He cited the famous Kinsey Reports as evidence of American sexual debauchery.

Qutb, who was dark skinned, also experienced racism in America. Back in Egypt, Qutb joined the Muslim Brothers organization. Imprisonment and torture made his writings more militant. Qutb became what Georgetown University religion and international affairs professor John Esposito calls "the architect of radical Islam."

Some Muslim Brotherhood groups, offshoots, and alumni are mainstream and nonviolent. Others have a violent legacy. A militant offshoot, Islamic Jihad, assassinated Egyptian president Anwar Sadat. Esposito notes that Abdullah Azzam, a radicalized former Muslim Brother, significantly influenced Osama bin Ladin. Former CIA Middle East case officer Robert Baer observes that a Kuwaiti Muslim Brother, Khalid Sheikh Muhammad, became a bin Ladin terror chief.

Princeton's Lewis notes that Sayyid Qutb's denunciation of American moral character became incorporated into radical Islamic ideology. For instance, he says Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini, in calling the U.S. the "Great Satan," was being

consistent with the Koranic depiction of Satan not as an “imperialist” or “exploiter” but as a seducer, “the insidious tempter who whispers in the hearts of men.”

The founder of the faith I follow, Jesus of Nazareth, told people to “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” It is not emotionally easy for me to love Osama bin Ladin or to pray for him. I have to ask God for strength for that.

Certainly bin Ladin’s hatred of me and my compatriots—flawed though we may be—does not justify his campaign of terror. His campaign rightly prompts national vigilance, a proverbial cost of freedom. But as we keep the powder dry, might it also be appropriate to individually reflect on the character that seems so offensive to him and his colleagues?

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## **“How Can I Respond to the Argument that Christ as the Only Way is Too Intolerant?”**

An issue that often comes up in talks about Christianity is tolerance. Can you help me respond to the argument, “Christ as the only way to Heaven is too intolerant”? Is Islam tolerant? Do Muslims believe Christians will go to heaven?

Concerning the claim that it is intolerant to assert that Jesus is the only way to Heaven, I think we must first point out that this is what Jesus Himself actually claimed in John 14:6: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes

to the Father, but through Me.” In other words, Christians are merely telling people what Jesus claimed; we are not asserting this simply on our own authority.

Second, we must try to help people to view Jesus’ claim as something which is either true or false. By focusing on the issue of truth, we help to dispel some of the negative emotional baggage which such a claim has for many people in our pluralistic society.

Third, we may want to use an analogy. For instance, is it intolerant to claim that  $2+2=4$ ? Is it narrow-minded, or naive, not to believe that (at least for some people)  $2+2$  may equal 3? Or 5? Or is it rather the case that  $2+2=4$  regardless of whether anyone believes this or not? See my point? Jesus’ claim to be the only way is either true or false. If it’s true, it is no more intolerant to assert its truthfulness than it is to assert that  $2+2=4$ . Sometimes there really is only ONE correct answer, after all.

Concerning the Islamic position on Christians in the afterlife, I doubt whether one can be completely dogmatic here. Suffice it to say that the general Islamic view regarding one’s final judgment before God can NEVER be known with certainty before it takes place. Even the most devout Muslims will acknowledge that they cannot be sure of their own entrance into Paradise (dying in a *Jihad*, a holy war, notwithstanding). And if they are not sure about themselves, I imagine they are even less sure about Christians. In fact, the Qur’an offers no forgiveness for one who commits the sin of *shirk*, which is to associate any partner with God. Thus, many Muslims would equate the Christian view of Jesus with *shirk*, in which case they would hold that Christians could never be admitted into Paradise. Having said that, however, there are probably some Muslims who would acknowledge the possibility of Christians being admitted into Paradise. But they would likely be quick to add that Christians would greatly improve their chances by converting to Islam!

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn

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# Islam and Christianity: Common Misconceptions Reveal Their Stark Differences

*Muslims and Christians often misunderstand what the other actually believes about God and salvation. Don Closson attempts to clear up some of these misconceptions.*



*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

In a recent meeting of evangelical leaders, anti-Islamic comments made by Christians in the Western media were denounced as “dangerous” and “unhelpful.” Ted Haggard, President of the National Association of Evangelicals stated that “Since we are in a global community, no doubt about it, we must temper our speech and we must communicate primarily through actions.”<sup>{1}</sup> Another prominent president of a Christian relief agency added that “It’s very dangerous to build more barriers when we’re supposed to be following [the] one who pulled the barriers down,” an obvious reference to the sacrificial death of Christ. They also concluded that it was “naive” to merely dialogue “with Muslims in a way that minimized theological and political differences.”<sup>{2}</sup>

So what kind of exchange of ideas is helpful between Christians and Muslims? We might start by beginning to clear up some of the common misconceptions that each hold about the other. This has become more important recently due to

heightened religious passions since 9/11 and the war in Iraq. Muslims, both here in America and abroad, are highly suspicious of America's intentions in the world and some Americans see every Muslim as a potential terrorist who threatens our freedom and democracy. There are obviously reasons behind both of these perceptions. America does tend to favor Israel over its Arab neighbors, and Muslims have committed atrocities against civilians around the world, but this only means that we must work harder at communicating clearly with Muslims when we have opportunity. The over one billion Muslims in the world constitute a large part of the mission field given to us by the Lord's Great Commission. We cannot turn away from them simply because of the difficulties we face.

That said, we need to realize that both Muslims and Christians hold to ideas about the other that are either completely wrong or merely too broadly applied. Some of these misconceptions are cultural issues and some are theological. Culturally, there are significant differences in how Islam and Christianity relate to society and government. Gender roles are also a source of confusion. Theologically, there is much to clarify regarding the respective roles of Jesus and Muhammad in each religious tradition. There is also misunderstanding regarding the origins and transmission of the sacred texts, the Koran and the Bible. Although the religions share commonalities—one God, the reality of a spiritual dimension, a universal moral order, and a final judgment—Islam and Christianity differ significantly in the details and in the most crucial issue of how one is justified before God.

## **Jesus and Muhammad**

Let's look at some common misconceptions that people have about Islam and Christianity, beginning with how people often confuse the roles that Jesus and Muhammad play in their respective traditions.

Christians often make the mistake of equating the place that Muhammad has in Islam with the role played by Jesus in Christianity. Although Muslims believe that Muhammad is the final prophet from Allah, most do not teach that he was sinless. On the other hand, Muslims see Muhammad's life and example as near to perfection as one can get. One Muslim scholar has noted, "Know that the key to happiness is to follow the sunna [Muhammad's actions] and to imitate the Messenger of God in all his coming and going, his movement and rest, in his way of eating, his attitude, his sleep and his talk..."[\[3\]](#) Every action of Muhammad is considered a model for believers. Some Muslims even avoid eating food that Muhammad disdained. At the same time, Muslims are offended at the term "Mohammedanism" sometimes used as a reference to Islam. It is not Muhammad's religion; he is only a messenger of Allah. Muslims believe that Muhammad's messages revived and reformed religious truth that had been lost.

Even so, any disparaging words aimed at Muhammad will be taken very seriously by a Muslim. As William Cantrell Smith once said, "Muslims will allow attacks on Allah: there are atheists and atheistic publications, and rationalistic societies; but to disparage Muhammad will provoke from even the most 'liberal' sections of the community a fanaticism of blazing vehemence."[\[4\]](#)

Muslims accuse Christians of elevating Jesus in an inappropriate manner. They argue that Jesus was just a prophet to the Jews, and that he heralded the coming of Muhammad as the seal of the prophets. The problem with this view is that it doesn't fit the earliest historical data we have regarding the life and teachings of Christ. There is considerable manuscript evidence for the authenticity and early date of the New Testament. In these early manuscripts, Jesus claims to have the powers and authority that only God could possess. These teachings and events were recorded by eyewitnesses or by second generation Christians like Luke who was a close

companion to Paul.

What is missing is an early text that affirms what Muslims claim about Jesus. Muslims argue that the New Testament has been corrupted and that texts supporting the idea that Jesus is the Son of God were a later addition. But again, the burden of proof for this accusation is one the Muslim apologist must bear. However, they do not provide any evidence for when or where the early manuscripts became corrupted. Muslims argue that the New Testament depiction of Christ and of his death and resurrection cannot be correct because the Koran teaches otherwise. Although Christians affirm the importance and authority of revelation, true revelation will be confirmed by history.

## **The Bible and the Koran**

There is an inherent problem when we consider the nature and content of the Bible and the Koran. Both traditions claim that their book is the result of divine revelation, and both maintain that their books have been preserved through the centuries with a high degree of accuracy. For instance, when touring a local Islamic center, I was told by the guide that the modern Koran contains the exact words given by Muhammad to his followers with absolutely no mistakes. Christians maintain that the Bible we possess is 99% accurate and has benefited from over 100 years of textual criticism and the possession of thousands of early manuscripts. The problem is that the Koran and the Bible make contradictory truth claims about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and what God expects from those who love and follow Him.

The Islamic view of the Bible is complicated by the fact that the Koran tells Muslims to accept both the Hebrew Scriptures and the "*Injil*," or the gospel of Jesus, and even calls the "Book," or Bible, the "word of God" in Sura 6:114-115.[\[5\]](#) On the other hand, Muslim apologists argue that both the Old and New Testaments have been corrupted and contain little if any

truth about God and His people. They contend that a lost gospel of Jesus has been replaced with Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

This view contains a number of problems. The Koran calls the Bible the word of God, and acknowledges that it is a revelation from God. It also teaches that Jesus was a prophet and that his teaching has authority. Finally, when the Koran was given by Muhammad it supported the New Testament of Muhammad's time by telling Muslims to go to Christians, who had been reading the Bible, to affirm Muhammad's message.[{6}](#) If this is so, we can assume that Muhammad believed that the Bible available in the seventh century was accurate. The Bible we use today is virtually unchanged from the Bible in the seventh century. In fact, it is probably more faithful to the earliest manuscript evidence. If the Bible of Muhammad's time was accurate, why isn't today's copy? Again, Muslims must do more than just claim that errors have occurred in the Bible, they must be able to show us when and where the errors occurred.

The Koran suffers from textual questions as well. Between Muhammad's death and the compilation of the Koran, some of what Muhammad had recited as revelation had already been lost due to the death of companions who had memorized specific passages.[{7}](#) Later, when multiple versions of the Koran caused controversy among Muslims, the Caliph Uthman ordered Zaid bin Thabit to collect all the copies in use, create a standard version and destroy the rest.

We have reasonably good copies of both the original Bible and the Uthmanic version of the Koran. However, both documents cannot represent revelation from God because the messages they contain cannot be reconciled.

## **Human Nature, Gender, and Salvation**

Islam and Christianity view the human predicament differently.

According to Islam, when Adam sinned he asked for forgiveness and it was granted by Allah. A Muslim author writes, "...Islam teaches that people are born innocent and remain so until each makes him or herself guilty by a guilty deed. Islam does not believe in 'original sin'; and its scripture interprets Adam's disobedience as his own personal misdeed—a misdeed for which he repented and which God forgave." [\[8\]](#) In fact, it is common among Muslims to see human failings as the result of forgetfulness or as merely making mistakes. People are frail, imperfect, constantly forgetful of God, and even intrinsically weak, but they do not have a sin nature. As a result, salvation is won by diligently observing the religious rituals prescribed by the five pillars of Islam, reciting the confession or Shahada, prayer, fasting, divine tax, and the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The Bible teaches that Adam's sin has affected all humanity. Romans 5:12 reads, "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. . . ." Paul later adds that, "Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous." We are made righteous not by doing good works but by faith in the substitutionary death of Christ on our behalf. Jesus bore our penalty for sin; he literally stood in our place and took our punishment.

Not only do Muslims and Christians have different views on human nature and salvation, but they also have dissimilar perceptions about gender. Although both religions teach that men and women have equal status before God, in reality the experience of women differs greatly under the two systems. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which Islam rejects, helps Christians to understand how women can be equal to men and yet

accept a submissive role in the family. The incarnate Jesus took on the submissive role of a Son and yet he was still fully God. There is no similar doctrine in Islam that teaches role differentiation between men and women and yet encourages gender equality before God. Islam places men over women in a way that Christianity does not. Islam allows for polygamy, and while men can marry non-Muslims, women cannot. Muslim men can divorce with a simple proclamation, women cannot. And although women have inheritance rights, they are always inferior to a man's. Finally, Muslim women do not enjoy equal legal rights, and Muslim men are instructed to strike their wives if they are disloyal.

## **Religion and the State**

How do the two traditions view the role of religion in society?

Christians in the West often view Islam through the lens of Western tolerance. In America especially, we are used to the separation of church and state, and assume that people everywhere enjoy such freedom. Many Muslims neither experience such separation nor see it as a good thing. For those who take the Koran seriously, Islam and Islamic law regulate all of life. The history of Islam supports the idea that the state should be involved in both the spread of Islam and the enforcement of religious duties by individual Muslims in Islamic societies.

Beginning with Muhammad, who was both a religious and political leader, down through the Caliphs and Islamic Empires, there has been little separation between religious and political law enforcement. Today in Saudi Arabia, the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (*mutawwa'in*, in Arabic) patrol public places in order to enforce religious laws, particularly the dress and habits of women in public.

In fact, the ultimate goal of many Muslims is what might be called a worldwide Islamic peace enforced by Islamic law. When Muslims talk of Islam being a religion of peace, it is often understood that this peace will occur only when Islam rules the world with Islamic law applied universally. As Syrian born Harvard professor Bassam Tibi has written, "...the quest of converting the entire world to Islam is an immutable fixture of the Muslim worldview. Only if this task is accomplished, if the world has become a 'Dar al-Islam [house of Islam],' will it also be a 'Dar al-Salam,' or a house of peace." {9}

Unfortunately, Christianity has at times had similar views regarding the use of government to enforce religious laws. Between the fourth century and the Reformation, the Christian practice of religious tolerance was spotty at best. But the growth of the separation of church and state in the West, which greatly enhanced religious tolerance, has led to another misconception. Muslims often assume that everyone in the West is a Christian. When they see the sexual immorality, drug use, and decline of the family in Western nations, they assume that this is what Christianity endorses. Christians need to be careful to separate themselves from the culture in which they live and help Muslims to see that our secular governments and society have mostly rejected Christian virtues. It is also helpful to communicate to Muslims that becoming a Christian is more than believing certain things to be true regarding Jesus and the Bible. It is about becoming a new creature in Christ through the indwelling and power of the Holy Spirit. It is about trusting in the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross.

## Notes

1. *The New York Times*, May 8, 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/08/national/08CHRI.html?th>
2. Ibid.
3. Geisler, Norman L., and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in the Light of the Cross*, (Grand Rapids: Baker

Books, 1993), p. 82.

4. Ibid., 80.

5. See also Sura 2:75 and Sura 5:46, 67, 69, 71.

6. Sura 10:94.

7. Ibin Abi Dawud, Kitab al-Masahif, p. 23.

8. Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, p. 43.

9. Downloaded from NewsMax.com on 5/22/2003 at [tinyurl.com/2tbwo6](http://tinyurl.com/2tbwo6)

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## **“Why Do You Lie About Islam?”**

**Why do you say lies about Islam? You have to be fair when describing other religions to Christians otherwise you are a liar.**

**You said that in Islam no one can make relation with God and that's not true. Everyone can make relation with God, moreover the topheads of islamic organizations can't claim they are better than common people cuz it's a pure heart issue in the first place.**

**You said in Islam God is unknown and that's tricky cuz for sure we know him but we didn't see him,so we know him morally not physically.**

**You said the prize is after death, and that's the greatest lie, cuz the rule that every Muslim know is, bad relationship with Allah(God)=discomfort in life, good relationship=comfort, contentment, and help of Allah. You said that everyone need forgiveness even Mohammed and that's not true, the truth is that we all need surplus from Allah cuz our good work can't reward blessing of Allah in life let aside the paradise.**

**You claim that Allah in Islam doesn't love anybody, however he loves the devout. Is that enough, or you want me to say more?**

**If you are innocent and said that by mistake then correct it and contact me, if you want to misguide your people, it's up to you and Allah will judge you.**

Thank you very much for taking time to read [the article on Islam](#), and especially for writing to us. We appreciate you. And we do honor your request that we be fair in what we say about religions beside Christianity. If there are errors in what we have said, we are certainly open to correction.

As I read your message, I noted the following objections to the article on Islam:

1. That there is no true relationship with God in Islam.
2. That God is unknown in Islam.
3. That salvation consists in the blessings that come after death, rather than during this life.
4. That everyone is in need of forgiveness, even Muhammed.
5. That God is not described as a loving God in the Koran.

I can understand why some of these statements would be offensive to you. Let me do my best in trying to respond to each of them.

First, that there is no true relationship with God in Islam. In reading over the article, I couldn't find this precise statement. But I did find the statement at the end of the article that "the New Testament . . . reveals the only source of acceptance before God in His love and grace, expressed through the sacrifice of His Son Jesus Christ . . . ." This is the clear testimony of the New Testament, and of Jesus Christ himself, and of his apostles. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father (God) but by me" (Gospel of John 14:6). The apostle Peter said, "Salvation is found in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

The name he referred to is Jesus Christ. This is a difficult statement to accept, I know. But it is the clear teaching of the New Testament, which also tells us that God is “the rewarder of those who earnestly seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). In other words, if we earnestly seek the truth of God, He will reveal it to us. And we believe that truth includes the teaching of Jesus Christ concerning his being the way to a relationship with God.

Second, that God is unknown in Islam. I did find the statement in the article that in the Koran, God is ultimately unknowable. I can understand your reaction to this statement. But it was intended to reflect the orthodox Muslim doctrine of mukhalafa (difference) and tanzih (removal or making transcendent), which implies that God’s essence is not really knowable to us . . . that the attributes or characteristics ascribed to God in the Koran are descriptions of his actions or deeds, but not of his nature or essence. This may not be widely comprehended by Muslim people, but it is a reflection of Islamic teaching. You can consult for reference the book entitled *The Call of the Minaret* by Kenneth Cragg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 42-43.

Third, that the “prize” is after death, and not in this life. I couldn’t really find a statement like this in the article. Actually, the New Testament teaches that there are many blessings that flow from our relationship with God through Jesus—both in this life and in the next. But obviously, knowing God does not shield us from ever experiencing pain and sorrow during this life. But it does assure us of the comforting grace and mercy of God, both now and after we die.

Fourth, that everyone needs forgiveness, even Muhammed. I know that among some Muslims, Muhammed is viewed as a nearly perfect man. And he obviously was a very great man. But the Koran itself testifies to his imperfection, and his need to ask forgiveness from God. See the following Koranic texts: 40.55; 41.19; 48.2. According to the the New Testament, all of

us stand in need of God's forgiving grace. At one point it says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23), and at another, "For the wages (penalty) of sin is death (eternal separation from God)" (Romans 6:23). This last text goes on to say, "but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." In other words, eternal life (which includes forgiveness of our sin, as well as fellowship with God) comes to us as a free gift. At another place the New Testament says, "For by grace are you saved, through faith; and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8-9). As it says in the Gospel of John, "Yet to all who received him (Jesus Christ), to those who believed in his name, he (God) gave the right to become children of God" (Gospel of John 1:12).

Fifth, that the Koran does not speak of God as a God of love or as a Father to his people. I know that one of the names of God in the Koran is "Al Wadud" (the Loving, Compassionate one). I believe it is used of God only twice in the Koran (11.90 and 85.14). Yet I think it is clear that this title falls short of the Bible's description in I John 4:8 that "God is love," as well as the many examples of God actually extending his love to sinners. For example, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (I John 4:10). Actually, the great Islamic theologian al-Ghazzali taught that this title for God refers only to his objective acts of kindness or expressions of approval. In his work *Al-Maqsad Al-Asna* he says, "He (God) remains above the feeling of love" (p. 91) and "Love and mercy are desired in respect of their objects only for the sake of their fruit and benefit and not because of empathy or feeling" (p. 91). In light of this, I would have to stand by the statement in the article that in the Koran God is not spoken of as a God of love or as a Father to his people (a title never attributed to God in the Koran), as He is in the

Bible.

Mr. \_\_\_\_\_, I do appreciate very much your writing to us. My purpose is not at all to offend you personally, but to encourage you to evaluate the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament, and to compare them to the teachings of Muhammed in the Koran. My wish and prayer is for God's blessing and grace on your life.

Sincerely,

Richard Rood