

UNDERSTANDING ISLAM

INTRODUCTION

"...but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame." (1 Peter 3:15-16)

- Can we defend our hope?
- Can we do so in a way that is gentle and respectful toward anyone who believes differently?
- Can we trust God to use our testimony to plant seeds of hope and faith in someone?

ISLAM'S HISTORY

- The Challenge of Semantics
 - Just like within the Church, there are different emphases within Islam. This is a particular challenge today, with terrorism in the name of Islam, ISIS, and other radical groups that don't accurately depict the beliefs or actions of the majority of Muslims.
 - We will consider Islam through its historical lens. Our lens is that Muhammad was a prophet and Muslims exclusively follow the teachings of Muhammad as revelations from Allah.

- What Muslims Believe

- Islam, the Original Religion

Muslims believe that Islam (meaning “submission” to Allah) is the original religion since the creation of Adam, the first prophet. Since the beginning of time, all people who submit to Allah are called Muslims. Over the centuries, Allah appointed thousands of prophets to warn and guide mankind. Prominent among them were *Ibrahim* (Abraham), *Musa* (Moses), *Dawud* (David), and *Isa Al Masih* (Jesus the Messiah).

- Muhammad, the Final Prophet

Mankind habitually strayed from the way of Allah revealed through the prophets. About AD 610 in Arabia, Allah sent the last prophet, Muhammad, who united the Arab tribes and turned them from idolatry to Islam.

The *shahada* is the most basic requirement within Islam, and children learn it at an early age. The *shahada* says, “there is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger.”

- The Spread of Islam

After the death of Muhammad in AD 632, Sunni Islam rapidly spread from Arabia under the leadership of the first four “rightly guided” rulers (*caliphs*) who were close companions of Muhammad. Shia Islam began to rapidly spread through the teachings of “infallible” Imams from the bloodline of Muhammad. To Muslims, the military and economic expansion of Islam liberated people suffering under the corrupt Byzantine and Persian Empires.

UNDERSTANDING THE PRIMARY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY

- On the broad religious spectrum, Islam and Christianity have much in common.
 - Both are mono-theistic.
 - Both believe in an eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, sovereign God.
 - Both believe God created mankind.
 - Both teach a resurrection and future judgment.
 - Both stress the importance of seeking God and following him.
 - Both lay claim to Abrahamic lineage.
 - Both teach that God has sent messengers.
 - Both teach that God has inspired divine Scriptures to guide us.
 - Both teach that we ought to care for one another and proclaim the truth to people everywhere.
 - Both have a reverence for Jesus! Both teach Jesus was born of a virgin and that he was the most miraculous man that ever lived.
 - Both the Bible and Quran teach that Jesus cleansed lepers, healed the sick, and even raised the dead. Both teach that Jesus is the Messiah, and Muslims await his return, as do Christians.
- For all the areas Islam and Christianity have in common, the differences are vast!

The Way To Life: A Law or a Person?

- Sharia

In Islam, the way to paradise is *sharia*, a code of laws to follow that will please Allah and earn his favor. Sharia is literally translated “the way.”

- Jesus

According to the gospel, the way to eternal life is Jesus. He said, “*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6).

- Comparing Sharia and the Gospel

God’s plan unfolded carefully over history. Adam was the first prophet in the Quran, but also mentioned are Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Job, Moses, Jonah, Aaron, Solomon, David, and Jesus.

The word *Islam* means submission, and all of these prophets submitted to Allah. Moses and Jesus received divine Scripture, and the revelation was written down as Torah and *Injil* (gospel).

Tragically, people did not faithfully follow the prophets. So in his mercy, Allah sent Muhammad and gave him the Quran. Islam teaches that Allah gave mankind the final, perfection religion (Quran 5.3), so Islam is the culmination of Judaism, Christianity, and all other religions. All people still following these religions are misled or rebellious. No religion will be accepted but Islam on the day of judgment (Quran 3.81-85).

Judgment is the major impetus to follow Islam. Though God may be merciful and absolve our sins, no one can intercede. People will be held accountable for their sins (Quran 6:164; 17:15; 35:18). A Muslim must live as good a life as they can to reach heaven, and hope for Allah’s merciful judgment.

Sharia is the solution to know *how to live*. Sharia literally means the “way to water.” Within Islam, following sharia is the way to life itself.

Sharia dictates almost every aspect of a devout Muslim's life. Of all practices, the Five Pillars of Islam are paramount:

- Shahada – There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his Messenger.
- Five daily prayers.
- Fasting during Ramadan
- Giving Alms
- Pilgrimage to Mecca

Since Muhammad is the embodiment of Islam, his way of life is what devout Muslims seek to follow. In addition to the Quran, *hadith* literature is second in importance only to the Quran. Sharia is derived from the Quran, exemplified in Muhammad's life, and explained by imans.

For the Christian, God is love. God created us to have fellowship with him. Sin destroyed that fellowship. We cannot un-sin. We cannot do enough good on our own. But God in love sent His Son, Jesus, as a perfect Substitute for our sins. God came to us through Jesus and made a way for us. God payed our sin penalty himself on the cross, and Jesus proved that he is the Way, Truth and the Life by rising from the dead.

WHO IS GOD?

- What Muslims Believe
 - Allah Is One

The absolute oneness of Allah is primary to Muslims. The greatest sin is to associate any partner with him. This sin is called *shirk*. Muhammad's message advocating one God was courageous because idolatry was the established religion of Arabia. Muhammad challenged this system and finally prevailed with the

message of monotheism. Islam is rooted in this commitment to the belief in one God. *Tawhid* teaches that Allah is absolutely one. One problem within Islam is that the average Muslim believes in an eternal Quran, and this poses a problem for the belief that only Allah is eternal.

- Allah Cannot Be Compared

Allah is transcendent and cannot be compared to humans or any other created thing. Allah's character and attributes are revealed through his 99 Arabic names, the two most common being "The Merciful" and "The Compassionate." Allah is never described in Islam by using human family terms such as "father" or "son." In the Quran he reveals his will for mankind to obey, not his person for mankind to relate with and know.

Muslims reject the idea that man is made in the image and likeness of God. Islam teaches that Allah is wholly other than his creation. Nothing in creation shares Allah's glory or likeness. And in contrast to being found "good" at his creation, the Quran teaches that man was made with a weakness (Sura 4:28).

- Allah's Ultimate Attribute: His Will

Allah creates and sustains all life, spiritual and material. His will is absolute and cannot be questioned by his creation. He is our final judge without a mediator. The best chance on Judgment Day is for those who live lives of righteousness and submission to Allah's will- *Insha Allah* (God willing).

- What Christians Believe

- God: A Unity, Not A Unit

The Bible teaches that God is one, but he is a complex unity, not just a simple unit. He is completely unique, a personal God who existed in relationship from eternity.

- God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit

Scripture reveals God as the ultimate Father, in name, character, and person, but always as the Creator, never with sexual references. God also reveals himself as the Eternal Word, who became flesh when the Holy Spirit overshadowed the Virgin Mary and conceived Jesus, the Messiah, who is also called the Son of God in the Bible. In his teaching, Jesus further reveals God the Holy Spirit, who was sent by the Father and himself.

The Bible presents a mystery of three persons revealed as one God. Although the word “Trinity” is not in the Bible, the term captures Bible truths about God. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are God, not just three parts of God or three names for the same person. God reveals himself as a tri-unity.

Although Islam believes that Christians are polytheists, the difference for Christian monotheism is not in number of gods, but on the concept of God’s personhood. The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that one God exists as three persons.

The Trinity in the Bible:

- There is only one God (Romans 3:30)
- The Father is God (John 6:27)
- Jesus is God (John 20:28, Romans 9:5)
- The Holy Spirit is God (Acts 5:3-5)
- These three are distinct persons (John 14:16-17)

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” - Matthew 28:19 All three persons in this verse share one name, because they are one being.

- God's Ultimate Attribute: His Love

The Bible says, "God is Love." This love existed from eternity as the Father loved the Son even before the foundation of the world. God's love is expressed through creation. God does not simply choose to love; his love chooses to act. *"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son" (John 3:16).*

- How to Correct Misunderstandings

- The Misunderstandings

Most Muslims consider Christians to be polytheists (people who believe in many gods) because of the Trinity. A popular misunderstanding of the Trinity is that Christians believe that a Father God had sex with a Mother god (Mary) to produce their "Son of God." No Christian believes this. Educated Muslims understand this false Trinity is not what Christians believe, but they still do not understand how the math can show God's unity. To them it is simple: $1+1+1=3$; Father + Son + Holy Spirit = Three Gods. This is not what Christians believe.

- Correcting the Misunderstandings

Rather than use an analogy of adding units ($1+1+1=3$), the Trinity has been explained as multiplied wholeness ($1\times 1\times 1=1$). The Bible says Jesus is the eternal "Word of God" revealed in flesh through the virgin birth. The Quran sets apart Jesus as "His (God's) Word" and "a spirit from Him (God)" and mentions his virgin birth and miracles. Muslims also believe in the second coming of Jesus, because Jesus is called the "Sign of the Hour" in the Quran. Muslims like to point out how the Quran honors Jesus. Yet such positive references to Jesus in the Quran are few compared to the complete story of Jesus preserved by God in the New Testament.

HOLY SCRIPTURES

- What Muslims Believe

- The Only Trustworthy Scripture

According to Muslims, there is only one trustworthy Holy Scripture, the Quran (“a text to recite”). Many prophets before Muhammad were also given Allah’s Word, among them: *Musa* (Moses) given the *Taurant* (Torah), *Dawud* (David) given the *Zabur* (Psalms), and *Isa* (Jesus) given the *Injil* (Gospel). However, Muslims are taught that all these writings were corrupted. Allah appointed Muhammad to receive the Quran in order to correct his corruption.

- How Muslims Got the Quran

In AD 610, Allah sent the archangel Gabriel (*Jibrail* in Arabic) to Muhammad in Mecca Saudi Arabia. Over the next 22 years, Allah “sent down” revelations to Gabriel who dictated them to Muhammad with the command to recite it to others. Shortly after Muhammad’s death in AD 632, his followers gathered the texts of different lengths into 114 chapters (*Sura* in Arabic). The third caliph, Uthman, had scholars compile an official Quran, in written form, and had all other variant texts burned.

- The Quran Today

The Quran is considered divine in its original Arabic form, and Muslims memorize and recite it only in this pure language.

- What Christians Believe

- How Christians Got the Bible

Followers of Jesus believe the Bible is the authoritative, inspired word of God, composed of 66 different books, transmitted through at least 40 prophets, apostles, and holy men. The first 39 books written before the coming of Christ, are called the Old Testament. The Old Testament was written over many centuries by various

authors in diverse cultures using the Hebrew and Aramaic languages. The remaining 27 books after Christ are called the New Testament. They were written in Greek, the dominant language of the 1st century. The New Testament contains collections of eyewitness reports of the life and teachings of Jesus, followed by a history of his disciples over the next 50 years, including letters from his apostles and a vision of the end times called the “Revelation.”

- Inspiration

The Christian view of inspiration is that God “breathed” his Word through many people (mostly inspiring, rarely dictating). Therefore the Bible reflects cultures as diverse as Abraham’s nomadic lifestyle to the royal court of King David. The result is a book of beautiful human diversity interwoven with divine unity.

- How to Correct Misunderstandings

- The Misunderstandings

Muslims feel sorry that Christians follow a corrupted book and most Muslims avoid the Bible. Even among Western-educated Muslims, the great diversity of Bible versions and translations adds to their belief that the Bible is corrupted.

- Correcting the Misunderstandings

Muhammad did not question the accuracy of the Bible; he criticized contemporary Jews and Christians for misinterpreting or not obeying their existing Scriptures. The accusation that the text of the Bible had been corrupted came centuries after Muhammad, at a time when Muslim scholars realized there were contradictions between the Quran and the Bible. Yet the Quran points to the Bible as truth to obey many times. The text of the Bible is better preserved than the writings of any ancient author. Furthermore, the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls confirmed the reliability of the Bible.

For further study, “Is the Quran the Word of God?” chapter in No God but One: Allah or Jesus, by Nabeel Qureshi

PROPHETS

- What Muslims Believe

- Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets

To Muslims, the Prophet Muhammad, called the “seal of the prophets,” is the last of over 124,000 prophets going back to Adam. His name means “praised one”, and he is commended by Allah in the Quran.

- Muhammad, the Reformer

Mecca was a center of idol worship in AD 610 when Muhammad first challenged the people to forsake idolatry and embrace Islam. Most Meccan’s rejected his message and many began to persecute the early Muslims, causing them to flee to the town of Medina in AD 622. (This flight is known as the *hijara* and marked the first year on the Islamic calendar.) Medina was more receptive to Muhammad, and from this city, through battles and diplomacy, Islam was spread to the entire Arabian Peninsula within only a few years after Muhammad’s death in AD 632.

- Muhammad, the Perfect Example to Follow

Muslims try to follow Muhammad’s example known as his *sumna* (“trodden path” or “customs”) in every detail possible. Everything is prescribed, from ritual washings before prayer to hygienic practices in the bathroom. Such detailed behavior is known through large collections of hadith, accounts of Muhammad’s life, words, and behavior passed on by his early followers.

- What Christians Believe

- Old Testament Prophecy

New Testament writers proclaimed Jesus as the fulfillment of the Law of Moses (Taurat) and the predictions of Old Testament prophets. These prophets are quoted in the New Testament. For instance, Matthew quotes various prophets concerning Jesus' birth in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2), his mother being a virgin (Isa. 7:14), and even the killing of baby boys by King Herod (Jer. 31:15). The prophets also detail the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus (Isa. 53; Ps. 16:8-11). The Bible points out that God carefully planned and carried out the details of the coming of Jesus in history (Luke 14:27; Acts 3:18).

- Christ's Warning about False Teachers

The Bible contains numerous warnings about false teachers and prophets. Jesus predicts the end times will be full of these (Matt. 24:11). Therefore, every teaching must be judged against the truth already revealed in the Bible. Jesus also promised that the Holy Spirit ("The Spirit of Truth") would guide truth seekers into all truth (John 14-16).

- How to Correct Misunderstandings

- The Misunderstandings

In conversation with Muslims, do not attack Muhammad. Since so much is determined by imitating their prophet, to insult Muhammad is to attack their entire life and culture.

- Correcting the Misunderstandings

It is wise to find common ground and agree that Muhammad has much in common with Old Testament prophets. Like David and Solomon, he was a political and military leader with multiple wives. Like Moses and Joshua, he united tribes and led them in battle.

Like Elijah and many other prophets, he destroyed idols and confronted the corrupt political and economic powers of his day.

Just as Old Testament prophets looked forward to the coming Messiah, Muhammad looked back with respect and admiration to Jesus as the Messiah. The Quran calls *Isa Al Masih* (Jesus) “His (God’s) Word” and “a Spirit from Him (God)” (Surah 4:171). It affirms Jesus’ virgin birth and special role in the end times, though not in the biblical sense.

Followers of Jesus do not have to insult or embrace Muhammad in order to exalt the Messiah. It is important to lift up Jesus, not tear down Muhammad.

PRACTICES AND RITUALS

- What Muslims Believe
 - The Five Pillars

The ritual practices of Islam are the pillars of their religious system. Although beliefs are important, the substance of their religion is the accomplishment of these five pillars.

- Confessing the Faith (*Shahada*)
- Prayer (*Salat*)
- Fasting (*Sawm*)
- Giving of Alms (*Zakat*)
- Pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*)

The Muslim’s objective is to follow Muhammad’s pattern (his exact words, motions, and timing) found in the sunna as they accomplish the pillars.

- Jihad

Some Muslims also consider “struggle (*Jihad*) in Allah’s way” central to their faith. This struggle could be internal (a struggle in the soul to do the right thing) or external (self-defense against attackers of Islam or Muslims). The interpretation of Jihad can determine the difference between moderate and radical Muslims.
- Judgment Day

Their belief in the nature of the final Judgment Day motivates Muslims to faithfully accomplish these pillars. In the Quran, these practices are of great importance.
- What Christians Believe
 - The Gift of Salvation

The Bible teaches that salvation is a gift from God through faith in Jesus Christ (*Isa Al Masih*) and there are no rituals or practices that anyone can do in order to get right with God (Eph. 2:8-9).
 - Jesus’ Seven Commands

Even though no one can be saved by good works, followers of Jesus serve him, imitate him, and do what he commanded because they are filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commands” (John 14:15) and that this “burden is light” (Matt 11:30). He gave seven specific commands.

 - Repent and Believe (a turn of heart)
 - Love God and Others (greatest command)
 - Pray (as a lifestyle, from the heart)
 - Celebrate the Lord’s Supper (remember Jesus)
 - Be Baptized (with water)
 - Give (with a joyful heart)

➤ Make Disciples (among all peoples)

Making disciples involves worship, fellowship, fasting, studying Scripture, and sharing the good news. Jesus said that his disciples would be recognized by their love for one another (John 13:35).

- How to Correct Misunderstandings

- The Misunderstandings

A Muslim can be confused by Christian symbols and rituals, such as the cross (considered a military symbol to Muslims) and the Lord's Supper when using wine (alcohol is prohibited in Islam). Christians are confused by some of the Muslim rituals as well.

- Correcting the Misunderstandings

If Christians and Muslims can communicate and completely understand the meaning behind these symbols and rituals, meaningful relationships can be built and truth-sharing can take place.

Following the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) is perhaps the best way for Christians to imitate Jesus and share with Muslims. The Sermon on the Mount challenges all followers of Jesus to live a righteous lifestyle of humility and love.

Muslims need grace-motivated Christian friends who follow the disciplines of Jesus. Jesus calls his followers to pray as a lifestyle, frequently and effectively. By confronting evil and bringing healing, believers can introduce Christ to their Muslim friends.

SALVATION AND PARADISE

- What Muslims Believe
 - Muslims deny original sin

The Quran teaches that “no liability of one soul can be transferred to another” (Sura 6:164; 17:15; 35:18; 53:38)

The Quran maintains that the person who sins “does evil to himself” (Sura 65:1).

- Muslims view sin primarily as weakness not wickedness

As long as they believe that Allah is not affronted by their sin, motivation to repent and confess their sin will be lacking.

I must feel the truth of hell—that it exists and is terrible and horrible beyond imaginings forever and ever. “They will go away into eternal punishment” (Matt. 25:46). Even if I try to make the “lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15) or the “fiery furnace” (Matt. 13:42) a symbol, I am confronted with the terrifying thought that symbols are not overstatements but understatement of reality. Jesus did not choose these pictures to tell us that hell is easier than burning.

I must feel the truth that once I was as close to hell as I am to the chair I am sitting on—even closer...Its views were my views. I was a son of hell (Matt. 23:15), a child of the Devil (John 8:44) and of wrath (Eph. 2:3). I belong to vipers’ brood (Matt. 3:7), without hope and without God (Eph. 2:12). I must believe that just as a rock climber, having slipped, hangs over the deadly cliff by his fingertips, so I once hung over hell and was a heartbeat away from eternal torment. I say it slowly, eternal torment!

I must feel the truth that God’s wrath was on my head (John 3:36); His face was against me (Ps. 34:16); He hated me in my sins (Ps. 5:5); His curse and fury were my portion (Gal. 3:10). Hell was not

forced on God by Satan. It was His design and appointment for people like me (Matt. 25:41).

I must feel in my heart that all the righteousness in the universe was on the side of God and against me. I was corrupt and guilty through and through, and God was perfectly righteous in His sentence (Ps. 51:4; Rom. 3:4).

Do you feel the truth and the horrors of hell when thinking of sharing the good news of God's salvation with others? How often do you reflect on the reality that you were once a child of hell destined for God's wrath? Even a popular verse like John 3:16—now largely sentimentalized by shallow views of God's love—tells us of an already pronounced condemnation that the entire world is under because of sin.

The horror and certainty of sin and hell must burden us and motivate us to share the truth about sin and its heinousness with our Muslim friends who think lightly of sin and its consequences. I agree with Piper when he writes, "If I do not believe in my heart these awful truths—believe them so that they are real in my feelings—then the blessed love of God in Christ will scarcely shine at all."

Sin is more than a "mistake" or a "weakness." Sin is a personal rebellion against God for which the Muslim is accountable to God. All those who die in their sins, never having repented of them and sought forgiveness through faith in Christ, will be eternally judged for their sins. Remember to weep over the horror of sin and God's judgment.

- Reward and Penalty

The Quran says, "For those who reject Allah, there is a terrible penalty: but for those who believe and work righteous deeds, there is forgiveness and a magnificent reward" (Surah 35:7). This great reward is *janna*, a garden paradise, an eternal place of sensual and spiritual pleasures.

- No Savior, but Mercy Is Possible

In Islam, there is no savior. Muslims believe Jesus was only a prophet and not God. They believe substitutionary atonement is scandalous (this is an example of how Muslim's think the Bible is corrupt). That is not to say salvation is impossible, for Allah is merciful and compassionate. He can always forgive-for Allah's will is supreme-but he is primarily the judge. There are many descriptive warnings about hellfire and punishment in the Quran.
- Judgment Day: A Motivation to Righteous Deeds

All people should fear Judgment Day, in which each person's deeds will be weighed on a scale. "Recording angels" keep a list of every deed, both good and bad. Islamic teachers assign credits to deeds related to the pillars of Islam. It is unthinkable for many Muslims to abandon their accumulation of credits and trust a Savior.
- Guarantee of Paradise?

Islamist terrorists interpret the Quran to suggest that paradise is guaranteed for jihad martyrs. Most Muslim scholars and leaders reject the terrorists' definitions of jihad and martyrdom.
- What Christians Believe
 - Judgment Day

Christians believe that after death, all people await the final Judgment when both believers and unbelievers will be resurrected. All will be judged according to the deeds they have done, but believers will be saved because God removed the record that contained the charges against them. He destroyed it by nailing it to the cross of Jesus (Col. 2:14). This would remove the list of bad deeds kept by any Muslim's "recording angel."

- The Gift of Salvation

Even if one's list of good deeds outweighs their list of bad deeds, this would not make them acceptable to God. The Bible says this would only cause boasting and pride, as though someone could impress God by his or her good deeds (Eph. 2:8-10). Instead, God has credited us with the righteousness of Christ, so salvation is a gift, not earned by anyone, not even martyrs, but bought with a great price (Jesus' blood).
- A Renewed Relationship with God

In addition to this great gift, God the Father adopts those he saves into his family so they may live with Jesus in heaven. To be saved involves being "born again" into a new relationship with God (John 3:5).
- How to Correct Misunderstandings
 - The Misunderstandings

Thinking about Allah as Father is unacceptable for all Muslims (Surah 112:3). Any negative view of the earthly father role will twist one's view of God. In Western cultures, parenting trends err toward permissiveness (more love than discipline. In the East, fathers tend to be negligent or authoritarian (more discipline than love). God is a Father, who shows both love and discipline. He wants loving followers, not slaves or spoiled children.
 - Correcting the Misunderstandings

This view of fatherhood makes it easier to relate to God as Father and to come to him as a humble child, ready to be loved and disciplined. Jesus said one must enter God's kingdom as a little child.

The final book of the Bible describes the future scene of a huge family gathering with many from every tribe, tongue, people, and ethnic group gathered around the throne of God (Rev. 5). Boasting

of good deeds would be unthinkable, because Jesus, the Lamb of God, sits upon the throne. Everyone in this great crowd honors Jesus as their substitute sacrifice, just as God pictured beforehand when he provided a ram to die in place of Abraham's son (Gen. 22).

ROLE OF WOMEN

- What Muslims Believe

- The Perspective of Muslim Women

Muslim women generally consider themselves protected and satisfied within their culture. Their fulfilling social life is usually gender-separated and happens primarily within extended families and some close neighbors.

- The Protection of Muslim Women

Women are valued in the Quran. Muhammad brought an end to the practice of female infanticide, widely practiced before his time, and he gave women the right to inherit. The honor of women is a major concern in Muslim societies. The reputation of the family is linked with the women. Islam helps maintain roles and expectations that predate Muhammad. The modest dress code is intended to protect women when outside the home. Muslim women do not need to wear a veil or loose clothes at home or when only women are present.

- Polygamy

Since marriage and child bearing are highly valued in Islamic society, polygamy is allowed and yet controlled. Islam limits a man to four wives and requires equal treatment for each.

- What Christians Believe

- The Perspective of Christian Women

Christians believe that the Bible teaches that both man and woman were created in God's image, had a direct relationship with God, and shared jointly the responsibilities of bringing up children and ruling over the created order (Gen. 1:26-28). Christian husbands and wives are to mutually submit to one another. Women are to respect their husbands; husbands are to sacrificially and selflessly love their wives, just as Jesus Christ loves his church (Eph. 5:21-25).

- The Protection of Christian Women

Christian women are to dress modestly (1 Tim. 2:9), and all followers of Jesus are to flee from sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:18).

- Not Conforming to the World

Followers of Jesus believe that they must be transformed by renewing their minds and avoid conforming to the patterns of the secular world (Rom. 12:2). Problems arise when Christians adapt to the Western secular culture more than to the Bible. When this happens there is a decline in morality which leads to an increase in sexual immorality, drunkenness, deceit, selfishness, rage, and other sins.

- How to Correct Misunderstandings

- The Misunderstandings

Western values conflict with Muslims regarding women perhaps more than any other category. There are several problems in Muslim societies in regard to women. However, secularism and woman's liberation have brought the "Christian" West several problems as well.

- Correcting the Misunderstandings

Christians, often focused on the plight of Muslim women, fail to see that many Western “solutions” are more to be feared than the problems they address. Many Muslim women prefer their lifestyle to lonely singleness, sexual exploitation, and the desire for money that makes home and family unimportant.

Societies long dominated by Islam have problems which need to be addressed, but before Christians can address these issues they must deal with their own cultural problems. As Jesus said, “You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye” (Matt. 7:5).

RELIGION AND CULTURE

- What Muslims Believe
 - The Muslim Holistic Worldview

Muslims understand religion as a whole and integrated way of life. Secular, Christian-influenced cultures can confuse and even anger Muslims who see things through their holistic worldview. They often view “Hollywood sexuality” as “Christian,” or a military action as a “Crusade.” To them, the cross is a military symbol.

- The Islamic Community

In Islam, brotherhood and consensus is emphasized, and individualism is avoided. The “community of the faithful” is responsible to enforce the moral code. This can explain how a lone Muslim, outside a community support structure, does not feel as guilty when breaking the code. However, bringing shame on his family or community would be a great sin.

Avoiding shame and protecting honor are primary motivations of most Muslims. Shame and honor are community-related, as contrasted to an individual sense of guilt.

Radical Muslims, known as Islamists or Jihadists, use this sense of community honor and shame to recruit and motivate their followers.

Jesus versus Jihad: What's the difference?

- What Christians Believe

- The Western Worldview

Followers of Jesus believe that they are to impact culture for Christ by going into all parts of the world to bring the message of Jesus to the people that live there (Matt. 28:19-20). In the West, a division exists between culture and religion. Religion is separated from government, and some people object to any influence of religion on state institutions and symbols.

- Community in the West

Followers of Jesus do influence Western culture and institutions, but they seem to be a shrinking influence. Western culture affirms individualism and some people avoid community responsibility. Tolerance of sin and unbiblical practices continue to dilute the true Christian message; evolutionism and theism also continue to influence the increasingly secular West. Only a minority of those in the West consider themselves followers of Jesus Christ. Most simply consider themselves Christian by name only, and do not follow the teaching of the Bible, of which they are largely ignorant. Generally, Western culture does not have a sense of the "community of the faithful."

- How to Correct Misunderstandings

- The Misunderstandings

Time magazine ran a cover article asking the question, “Should Christians Convert Muslims?” The artwork featured a militant-looking clenched fist holding a metal cross, reminiscent of a Crusader’s sword. This imagery correctly symbolizes some typical Muslim misunderstandings, especially when viewed with the cigarette advertisement on the back cover. The advertisement features a sensual goddess-like model with men fawning at her feet. These pictures display some fears of Muslims: to be dominated militarily and corrupted morally by “Christianity.”

- Correcting the Misunderstandings

The challenge is to present a correct view of the cross. The movie, “The Passion of the Christ,” has been seen by Muslims all over the world. They have seen the cross as a symbol of suffering, not as a military or political icon. Followers of Jesus, through their words and actions, are called to show Muslims that God loves all people so much that Jesus died on the cross for their sins. (Islam denies Jesus’ death; claims that he was lifted up to heaven and a substitute died instead of him.) Jesus also defeated Satan and death by rising from the grave. He made it possible for all of God’s children to live with him forever. This “good news” should be attractive to Muslims.