
Islam and Political Correctness

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Muhammad and Islam

Nearly everyone can remember what they were doing on September 11, 2001. That fateful day affected all of us and certainly increased our desire to know more about Islam. In the years following, we have all learned more about the world's second largest religion. But sometimes, political correctness has clouded clear thinking about Islam.

We hear that "Islam is a religion of peace." Some even say, "The God of Islam is the same God as the God of the Jews and the Christians." So what is the truth about these statements about Islam?

I want to look at some of these statements and provide a biblically-based response. We need to know the facts about Islam and this current war on terror.

The first statement we will address is often heard in religion classes on college campuses. That is that "Muhammad is like every other religious founder." This simply is not the case. For example, nearly every major religion in the world teaches a variation of the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Islam does not have a Golden Rule. Instead, it makes very definite distinctions in the way Muslims are to treat believers and unbelievers. The latter are called infidels and are often treated harshly or killed. This religious perspective is very different from other religions.

For a moment, let's compare Jesus and Muhammad. Muslims believe that Muhammad is the final prophet from Allah. He is referred to as the "seal of the prophets" (Sura 33:40). But while he is revered as the greatest of the prophets, most do not teach that he was sinless. The Qur'an does not make the claim that he was sinless, and there are passages that teach that Muhammad was a man like us (Sura 18:110) and that Allah told Muhammad that he must repent of his sins (Sura 40:55).

By contrast, Jesus claimed to be God and claimed to have the powers and authority that only God could possess. The New Testament provides eyewitness accounts or records of eyewitness accounts of the claims that Jesus made and the miracles he performed. Moreover, the New Testament teaches that Jesus Christ lived a perfect and sinless life (2 Cor. 5:21).

Muhammad's every action is to be imitated by Muslims. His life is a model for these believers. Some Muslims even avoid eating food that Muhammad avoided or never was able to eat. In fact, Muhammad is so revered by Muslims that no perceived criticism upon him or even his likeness (e.g., through a cartoon) may be allowed.

Muhammad also taught that Muslims are to fight in the cause of Allah (Sura 4:76) and fight against the unbelievers (Sura 9:123). By contrast, Jesus taught that Christians are to love their enemies (Matt. 5:44) and turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39).

In conclusion, we can see that the life of Muhammad is different from many of the other founders of religion. Moreover, the life of Muhammad and the life of Jesus Christ are very different.

Islam: A Religion of Peace?

One politically correct phrase that is often repeated is that "Islam is a religion of peace." While it is true that many Muslims are peace-loving, is it also true that Islam is a religion of peace? To answer that question, it is important to understand the meaning of jihad.

The word jihad is actually the noun of the Arabic verb jahidi, which means to "strive hard." This verse is an example: "O Prophet! Strive hard against the unbelievers and the hypocrites, and be firm against them. Their abode is Hell, and evil refuge indeed" (Sura 9:73).

Although some Muslims understand this striving to be merely intellectual and philosophical, the usual translation of jihad involves a holy war. That has been the traditional interpretation since the time of Muhammad.

Jihad was to be waged on the battlefield. Sura 47:4 says, "When you meet the unbelievers in the battlefield, strike off their heads and, when you have laid them low, bind your captives firmly." Sura 9:5 says, "Fight and slay the pagans wherever you find them, and seize them, beleager them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem."

Consider some of these other passages concerning jihad. Faithful Muslims wage jihad against unbelievers: "O ye who believe! Fight the unbelievers who gird you about, and let them find firmness in you; and know that Allah is with those who fear Him" (Sura 9:123).

Muslims are also to wage jihad not only against unbelievers but against those who have strayed from the faith: "Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites and deal rigorously with them. Hell shall be their home: and evil fate" (Sura 9:73).

Another way to understand the term "jihad" is to look at the historical context. After Muhammad's success in the Battle of Badr, he set forth various principles of warfare. For example, according to Sura 9:29, jihad is a religious duty. He taught in Sura 9:111 that martyrdom in jihad is the highest good and guarantees salvation. Sura 9:5 says that Muslims engaged in jihad should not show tolerance toward unbelievers. And acts of terrorism are justified in Sura 8:2.

While it may be true that there are peaceful Muslims, it is not true that Islam has always been a peaceful religion. The teaching of jihad and the current interpretation by radical Muslims of this concept can easily be seen in the acts of terrorism around the world.

The Qur'an and the Bible are Both Violent Books

Whenever verses of the sword from the Qur'an are quoted, you can be sure that someone will quickly point out that the Old Testament calls for violence. But are these two books morally equivalent? Let's look at some of these passages and see.

The Qur'an calls for jihad against the unbelievers (or infidels). Sura 9:5 says, "Fight and slay the pagans wherever you find them, and seize them, beleager them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem."

Sura 9:29 says, "Fight those who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by Allah and His Prophet, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the jizyah [per capita tax imposed on non-Muslim adult males] with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued."

Sura 47:4-7 says, "When you meet unbelievers, smite their necks, then, when you have made wide slaughter among them, tie fast the bonds; then set them free, either by grace or ransom, till the war lays down its loads...And those who are slain in the way of God, He will not send their works astray. He will guide them, and dispose their minds aright, and He will admit them to Paradise, that He has made known to them."

In the Old Testament, you have a call for military action against specific groups. Deuteronomy 7:1-2 says, "When the Lord your God brings you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and clears away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you, and when the Lord your God delivers them before you and you defeat them, then you shall utterly destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them."

1 Samuel 15:2-3 says, "Thus says the Lord of hosts, I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he set himself against him on the way while he was coming up from Egypt. Now go and strike Amalek and utterly destroy all that he has, and do not spare him; but put to death both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey."

While there are some similarities, notice the difference. In the Old Testament, there was a direct and specific command to fight against a particular group of people. These passages do not apply to you unless you are a Hittite, Girgashite, Amorite, Canaanite, Perizzite, Hivite, Jebusite, or Amalekite. These commands given during the Old Testament theocracy apply only to those people at that time.

However, the passages in the Qur'an apply to all unbelievers at all times. Notice that there is no time limit on these universally binding commands to all Muslims at all times.

No Christian leader is calling for a Holy War against infidels. But many Muslim leaders cite the Qur'an for that very action. Osama bin Laden, for example, quotes many of these verses of the sword just cited within his various fatwas [legal pronouncement].

And contrast this with the New Testament which calls for believers to love their enemies (Matt. 5:44) and turn the other cheek (Matt. 5:39). In conclusion, the Bible and the Qur'an are very different in regard in calling to an act of violence.

Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God?

One politically correct phrase that is often repeated is that "Christians and Muslims worship the same God." It is understandable that people might say that. Both Islam and Christianity are monotheistic, even though a foundational difference is the Christian belief in the trinity.

Certainly the most foundational doctrine in Islam is monotheism. This doctrine is encapsulated in the creed: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah." And not only is it a creed, it is a statement of faith that routinely heard from the lips of every faithful Muslim. It the creed by which every Muslim is called to prayer five times a day.

Because of this strong emphasis on monotheism, Muslims reject the idea that God could be more than one person or that God could have a partner. The Qur'an teaches that Allah is one God and the same God for all people. Anyone who does not believe this is guilty of the sin of shirk. This is the quintessential sin in Islam. According to Islam, God cannot have a partner and cannot be joined together in the Godhead with other persons. Muslims therefore reject the Christian idea of the Trinity.

Muslims and Christians also differ in their understanding of the nature and character of God. The God of the Bible is knowable. Jesus came into the world that we might know God (John 17:3).

Islam teaches a very different view of God. Allah is transcendent and distant. He is separate from His creation. He is exalted and far removed from mankind. While we may know His will, we cannot know Him personally. In fact, there is very little written about the character of God. Allah is the creator and sustainer of the creation, but He is also unknowable. No person can ever personally know and have a relationship with Allah. Instead, humans are to be in total submission to the will of Allah.

Moreover, Allah does not personally enter into human history. Instead, he deals with the world through His word (the Qur'an), through His prophets (such as Muhammad), and through angels (such as Gabriel).

If you ask a Muslim to describe Allah, most likely they will recite to you a key passage that lists some of the names of God (Sura 59). The Qur'an requires that God be called by these "beautiful names." This passage describes him as Most Gracious, Most Merciful, The Sovereign, The Holy One, The Guardian of Faith, The Preserver of Safety, The Exalted in Might, etc.

Finally, a Christian and Muslim perspective on God's love is also very different. Christians begin with the belief that "God so loved the world" (John 3:16). By contrast, Muslims grow up hearing about all the people Allah does not love. Sura 2:190 says, "For Allah loves not transgressors." Sura 3:32 says, "Allah loves not the unbelievers." And Sura 3:57 says, "For Allah loves not the evildoers."

In conclusion, we can see that Christians and Muslims do not worship the same God.

Are the Bible and Qur'an the same?

A student in a university religion class may hear that all religions are basically the same. They only differ on minor details. This leads some to argue that the Bible and the Qur'an are compatible teachings. This is not true and is a disservice to both Islam and Christianity.

We should acknowledge the few similarities. Both the Bible and the Qur'an claim to be divine revelation. And both books claim to have been accurately preserved through the centuries.

But it is also true that the Bible and the Qur'an disagree with one another on major issues. The two books make contradictory claims about God, Jesus, salvation, and biblical history. Both claims cannot be true. They both could be false, but they cannot both be true because the accounts contradict each other. Here are just a few examples of these contradictions:

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The Qur'an teaches (Sura 5:116) that Christians worship three

gods: the Father, the Mother (Mary) and the Son (Jesus). But the Bible actually teaches that there is one God in three persons (the Trinity).

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The Qur'an says (Sura 37:100-111) that Abraham was going to sacrifice Ishmael, while the Bible teaches that Abraham was going to sacrifice Isaac.

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The Qur'an teaches (Sura 4:157) that Jesus was not crucified. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ was crucified on a cross.

Before we conclude, we should also mention that many of the statements in the Qur'an are also at odds with historical facts that can be verified through historical accounts.

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The Qur'an says (Sura 20:85-97) that the Samaritans tricked the Israelites at the Exodus and were the ones who built the golden calf. For the record, the word Samaritan wasn't even used until 722 B.C. which is several hundred years after the Exodus.

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The Qur'an also states (Sura 18:89-98) that Alexander the Great was a Muslim who worshiped Allah. Alexander lived from 356 B.C. to 323 B.C. which was hundreds of years before Muhammad proclaimed his revelation which became the religion of Islam.

In conclusion, we can see that the Bible and the Qur'an are not the same and do not have compatible teachings.

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