

CHURCH HISTORY TURNING POINTS

Lesson 21

Muhammad and Islam – Part 2

In the last few days, I got an email from a Christian lawyer friend in Alabama. He wrote me asking,

I'm studying Matthew 7:15. Considering false prophets or false teachers among us today, what message or messages do you think have the greatest tendency to keep people from genuinely following Christ?

The Matthew passage was a warning from Jesus to his followers:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

My reply to Andy was short, but reflected what I believe to be the greatest false messages in America. I wrote,

I think that most people are so wrapped up in themselves, that any message that caters to the individual (what we already think, what we already like, what we find self-satisfying or self-approved) is one that resonates as "truth" even though it may be false. We have a generation that measures truth by their own experience and feeling, rather than an objective measuring rod like Scripture.

This is truly "sheep's clothing." It's what folks want!

We live in an independent society and age in America. The Internet has opened up for everyone an exhaustive sea of information, and to some degree we have become a society able to find what we want, when we want it. It reinforces this self-definition of not just right and wrong, but of who God is, what he or she is like, and more. We become masters of our own beliefs in ways that couldn't have happened before. You can always find someone on the Internet who will feed whatever intellectual meal you wish to eat.

The key for the believer is to look for truth. Sometimes that takes a deep examination, but truth can be found. It is not always what we find on the Internet. It is not always what we want to hear or believe, but truth can be found.

The key is to want the truth, which is not always the case with all people. We see this as we look at how people approach salvation and the Bible. Some look at the holiness of God put forth in Scripture and are so overwhelmed, they fall under the

weight and seek mercy. Others glimpse God's holiness and reduce it, and the Bible, to a list of do's and don'ts that can be achieved through human effort. Reinterpreting God's truth in this way allows such a person to live as if they are righteous before Almighty God on their own merit. It is an entrancing belief that affirms not only self-satisfaction, but also removes the imperative of trusting in the mercies of an unseen God.

A key fundamental of orthodox Christianity is the *atonement* of Jesus Christ. It is the fundamental truth of Jesus as God and man paying the price of sin on behalf of people who could never measure up. This is a core Christian truth that stands opposed to the teaching of Islam. It is our goal to unfold those differences in this lesson.¹

BACKGROUND

When two seeds are sprouting, it is often hard to determine exactly what plant is growing. The seed coat is shed, and often the first thing seen are not true leaves, but what botanists would call "cotyledon." The true leaves come next. At this early stage, while comparing two plants, the unlearned might consider two plants very similar when, in fact, they are hugely different in size, shape, and function.

So it is with Christianity and Islam. An initial and superficial glance can show Islam and Christianity having great similarities. There are a number of Christian scholars who consider Muhammad to have been a Christian heretic, rather than an instigator of a new faith.² Whether these scholars are correct or not, the differences between Islam and Orthodox Christianity go to the core of both faiths.

¹ Readers are urged to look at the footnoted source material should they want additional reading materials and information. I should also add a note about the source material used in these lessons. There are a number of books written about the beliefs of Islam, the beliefs of Christianity, and even the comparison of the two. I have not used any one source, but have tried to use the Qur'an and Bible themselves as much as possible to substantiate the teachings of this class. Where I have used the analysis of others, I have not used Christian material to determine the beliefs of Muslims. Neither have I used Muslim materials to explain the beliefs of Christians. I have tried using Muslim authors or independent scholastic works for Islamic doctrine. One final note – there are over one billion Muslims in the world. They have a multitude of teachings and beliefs. It is no more fair to characterize "all Muslims believe..." based on teachings or writings of any particular person or group than it would be to characterize all Christians as believing what one televangelist might say on a particular show. That being said, I do set out certain core beliefs that seem to have the greatest support among the Muslim ideologists.

² See, for example, the work of Giulio Basetti-Sani, *The Koran in the Light of Christ: a Christian interpretation of the sacred book of Islam* (Franciscan Herald Press 1977).

The plant grown from the roots of one will result in a vastly different tree than that from the other.

Cotyledons A and B – Are the plants *that* different?



A



B

A becomes a sunflower; B becomes a mighty tree!



My format in this lesson is to consider basic subjects of orthodox Christianity followed by the Islamic teaching on the same subject. Obviously, this lesson is written from a Christian faith, so where Islam embraces a truth contrary to Christian truth, I try to explain the validity of the Christian position.

As we approach this lesson, we should remember that Muhammad did not teach that Jews and Christians were worshipping a different God. For Muhammad, the God of Abraham and the God of Jesus was the same one God that Muhammad worshipped. The Muslims call God “Allah,” but that is an Arabic word that references the one God. Muslims prefer the Arabic term because it refers only to God. The English “God” can be used to reference multiple “gods” (albeit without capitalization!).³ For Muhammad, the Qur’an was the Biblical God’s revelation

³ Islam generally teaches 99 names for Allah revealed in the Qur’an. Some Muslims teach that there are 4,000 names of God, each expressing God’s different attributes. Only God knows 1,000 of the names. Angels and God know another 1,000. God, the angels, and the prophets all know another 1,000. God, Angels, prophets, and believers know the last 1,000. Of these 1,000, 300 are in the Torah (first five books of the Old Testament), 300 in the Psalms, and 300 in the

for all people. It was a clarification of Biblical issues and a more direct and clear recitation of God's word, which Jews and Christians had corrupted over the centuries. Muhammad was not teaching Islam as a "new religion" as much as he taught it to be a restoration of the original religion that God handed to Abraham.

NAMES

"Christianity" is the faith of "Christians." Seems simple, no? "Christians" as a label or word was first used for the followers of Jesus Christ in Antioch, a city north of Israel in modern Syria. This expression was noted in New Testament times. The historian Luke records in Acts 11:26,

The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.

In the Greek used by Luke, "Christian" is merely the title "Christ" (χριστός – "*Christos*") turned into an adjective (χριστιανός - "*Christianos*"). The first use we have of the word "Christianity" is from Ignatius of Antioch (see Church History lesson 5) around 110AD. Ignatius wrote,

Therefore, having become his disciples, let us learn to live in accordance with Christianity [χριστιανισμός- "*Christianismos*"].⁴

We see here the core meaning of both Christian and Christianity. A "Christian" is one who follows "Christ." Because "Christ" itself is the Greek word for "anointed," which in Hebrew is "messiah," it is a label given to Jesus of Nazareth. "Christian" refers to those who follow Jesus believing that Jesus is the Messiah or Anointed one of God. So, "Christianity" is the faith of those who follow Jesus as "Christ."

"Islam" comes from an Arabic root. Arabic, like other "Semitic" languages⁵ is based on three letter roots. Typically, three consonants form a family of related words based on a core concept or meaning. In the case of Islam, the letters are

gospels. The last 100 (99) are in the Qur'an. See, Kahn, Gabriel, *Muhammad the Prophet*, (Thunder Bay Press 2001) at 96.

⁴ Ignatius, *Letter to the Magnesians* 10:1 (Lightfoot and Harmer translation).

⁵ The "Semitic" languages include, among many other languages Arabic and Hebrew. These languages grew from common roots and have distinct features from those languages that grew out of India and Europe, including the Romance languages (descending from Rome or Latin) and the Germanic languages (including English). So, for example, Semitic languages are generally written from right to left while European languages are written left to right.

“S,” “L,” and “M.” Those letters get various vowel sounds or other letters added which then vary the meaning. In Hebrew, another Semitic language, the same three core letters are used to make “*Shalom*” meaning “peace” (“S” and “Sh” are the same). In Arabic, the core meaning of the consonants “S, L, M” is similar to the Hebrew. The letters have a core meaning of “surrender” or “peace.” “*Islam*” as a word references a “surrendering” to God or making peace with God. In Arabic, adding an “M” to the “S, L, M” consonants makes one who “does Islam” or who surrenders to God. That is the word “*Muslim*.” So, “Islam” is a faith of surrender to God, and a “Muslim” is one who practices “Islam.”

SCRIPTURE

Christianity uses the Bible as its scriptures. The Bible is both the Old and New Testament.⁶ The Bible itself sets forth its authority in passages like 2 Timothy 3:16-17,

All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Because of this core belief that the Bible is the very breath of God expressed for his people, Christians have worked for centuries to maintain the integrity and availability of those scriptures for humanity. Long before the advent of printing presses, great care was taken to see that correct copies of scripture were made and kept for the generations. One need only read the unearthed Dead Sea Scrolls of the Old Testament that were discovered in the 1940s and later, but were written in the centuries preceding Christ, and compare them to copies of those same scriptures that were made after 1000AD. When the comparison is made, one readily sees how carefully and accurately the texts were copied and transmitted.

Islam uses the Qur’an⁷ as its scriptures. The Qur’an is not divided into books like the Bible; rather it is one book divided into “*Surahs*” or chapters. There are 114 *Surahs* in the Qur’an. They are not arranged chronologically or topically. There is no clear narrative pattern that one can follow reading the Qur’an (except for *Surah* 12 which gives a narrative account of the Biblical Joseph from Genesis).

⁶ Certain groups, notably the Roman Catholics, also use the Apocrypha as scripture. For background on this issue, please reference the Biblical Literacy lessons on the subject. The lessons are written from a protestant perspective and can be found at the website www.Biblical-Literacy.com. For a Catholic perspective, the Catholic Encyclopedia provides a good background and is also available online.

⁷ Also spelled “Koran,” depending on how one transliterates the Arabic word.

They are arranged in descending order of length, the longer ones first and the shorter ones last. Most modern versions of the Qur'an will give a title before each chapter/*Surah* that tells how many verses are in the chapter (the '*ayat*') as well as whether the chapter was revealed to Muhammad while in Mecca or Medina.

Muslims consider the Qur'an the literal word of God as written in Arabic.

It is God speaking, not merely to the Prophet [Muhammad] in seventh-century Arabia, but from all eternity to all humankind.⁸

In the Qur'an, we supposedly have the revelations of God transmitted to Muhammad through the angel Gabriel (see lesson last week). The Muslims do not see the Qur'an as

a book inspired or influenced by God or written under the guidance of His Spirit: rather it is viewed as God's direct speech.⁹

The Qur'an claims it is,

the revelation of the Book, in which there is no doubt, from the Lord of the universe. Do they perchance say, 'He made it up'? No, this is the truth from your Lord (32:2-3).¹⁰

The Qur'an contains an assortment of material. Some of the verses are instructions on how to live while others give explanations of God and his work. For example, we read an instruction for living in 16:115 where the Muslim is told to avoid eating "carrion and blood, and the flesh of swine, and anything offered up to other than God." An example of teaching on God and his work is found in 32:4 where we read, "God is the one who created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in six days, then mounted the throne."

The Qur'an contains many references to the Bible and people of the Bible. We read of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon,

⁸ Farid Esack, *The Qur'an, a User's Guide* (One World Publications Oxford 2005) at 100.

⁹ Farid Esack, at 31.

¹⁰ In this paper, I am using a modern translation of the Qur'an by Thomas Cleary. (Starlatch Press 2004). In his translation, he translates *Allah* as "God," which is the strict meaning of the Arabic word. There is a constant predicament when quoting from the Qur'an. Translation of the Qur'an is officially forbidden. It is written in the classical Arabic dialect, which only the highly educated can understand. It is remarkable how few Muslims can even read the Qur'an. Most memorize simply the prayers, and have no real idea what many of the words mean.

John the Baptist, Jesus, and others. As referenced earlier, the story of Joseph told in the Qur'an (with a number of deviations from the story recorded in Genesis) is quite long.¹¹

The Qur'an's storylines and references to the Biblical people often conflict with the Bible. The Muslim would tell you that the Bible is the corrupted text. The Christian response is one based on the historical accuracy and credibility of scripture. Here is where lessons we derive from scholastic study of scripture are invaluable. If the Bible is corrupted from its original state to the degree required for the Qur'an to be historically accurate, then there would surely be some evidence in the thousands of old manuscripts for the deviated readings and storylines in the Qur'an. But, there is not. Moreover, we have renderings of New Testament passages from reliably dated manuscripts that go back to the 100's. These passages and manuscripts clearly demonstrate the integrity of the scriptures that form the basis of Christian orthodoxy and the Bibles translated and used today.

The Christian would also note that if the Qur'an does not accurately convey the historical stories, then the validity of its accuracy on theology and doctrine is immediately suspect. God's very words could never be wrong.

JESUS

The identity of Jesus is obviously a core tenet of the Christian faith. Scripture teaches Jesus is incarnated God who emptied himself in becoming a human and being made in the likeness of man. Jesus then humbled himself to the point of an atoning death for the sins of fallen humanity. From this, however, Jesus was restored to his throne in heaven with an assurance that a day will come when all people will acknowledge him as Lord of lords, King of kings, Name above all names, worshipping the Lord Jesus. (See, Phil. 2:5-11).

Some people are shocked to find Jesus spoken of in the Qur'an. Jesus is mentioned 69 times in the Surahs. A sampling is below:

- “We [the angels] gave Jesus Son of Mary clear proofs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit” (2:87).

¹¹ For example, in the Bible, it is apparent that Potiphar believes that Joseph sought to abuse Potiphar's wife and Potiphar “burned with anger” putting Joseph in prison (Gen. 39). The way Muhammad tells the story, Potiphar (Muhammad does not use his name) deduces that his wife was the seducer because Joseph's shirt is ripped from the back as if he was fleeing rather than the front. So, Potiphar rebukes his wife, “This was a trick of you women. Your trick is serious indeed!” Potiphar then tells Joseph to “Turn away from this” and his wife to “seek forgiveness for your sin; it was you in the wrong” (12:25-29).

- “Say, ‘We believe in God, and what was revealed to us, and what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and what was given to Moses and Jesus, and what was given to the prophets’ (2:136).

The Qur’an even teaches the virgin birth of Jesus, calling him “Messiah.”

The angels said, “O Mary, God gives you the good news of a word from God, named the Messiah, Jesus Son of Mary, honored in the world and hereafter, and one of the intimates of God... She said, “My Lord! How can I have a son, when no man has touched me?” “Thus does God create at will: when God decides on something, God simply says to it ‘Be!’ and it is (3:45-47).

The Jesus of the Qur’an, however, is not the Divine Christ. Here the reflections of the Arian heresy are clearest on Muhammad’s teachings. This brings up some more historical details to Islam beyond our lesson last week.

Some of the oldest writings on Islam are found from the pen of John Mansur, known historically as St. John of Damascus. To put John into his historical context, remember that Muhammad died in 632AD. We are uncertain of John’s birth, but most scholars place his birth around 43 or 44 years after Muhammad’s death. We don’t have great details of John’s life (at least not that scholars consider reliable), but we do have some of his writings from the 700AD era. John lived in Arab lands, but had a decent amount of freedom, with his father and grandfather even working for the Arab ruler.

John considered Islam to be simply a Christian heresy. He wrote of a “false prophet named Muhammad” that appeared amidst the Saracens (aka descendants of Ishmael).¹² John said Muhammad,

After having chanced upon the Old and New Testaments and likewise, it seems, having conversed with an Arian monk, devised his own heresy. Then, having insinuated himself into the good graces of the people by a show of seeming piety, he gave out that a certain book had been sent down to him from heaven.¹³

¹² As we prepare for Greek, it is notable that John gives the origination of “Saracens” as two Greek words, Sarras (Σάρρας) and kenoi (κενοί). These words are the Old Testament name of “Sarah” and the word for “empty” or “destitute.” He cites Sarah sending Hagar and Ishmael away with nothing or destitute, and traced the name of his descendants accordingly.

¹³ Saint John of Damascus, *On Heresies*, at 101. Translation used, Chase, Frederic, *The Fathers of the Church: St. John of Damascus Writings*, (Catholic University Press 1958).

John then goes into great detail showing how in one breath Muhammad would credit Jesus as God's Word and Spirit, yet insisted Jesus was made, and Jesus quickly denied the claims of Jesus as divinity after his death¹⁴ when he appeared to God.

The Qur'an records,

And God will say, "Jesus Son of Mary, did you tell people, 'Take to me and my mother as deities...?'" He [Jesus] will say, "Glory to You!... If I used to say that you would have known it... I never told them anything but what you instructed me" (5:116-7).

Clearly there are differences in the Qur'an's treatment of Jesus and the treatment in the Bible. This brings into examination the reliability of each, and makes this church history class of great importance. The Muslim answer to the differences in the Bible and the Qur'an is a claim that the Qur'an is pure while the Bible has been corrupted.

In this regard, the Muslims disregard the teachings of Paul as well as much of what is contained in the gospels. A classic case in point is where Paul wrote about the Jewish struggle over Jesus as God in light of Jesus being crucified. Some Jewish believers in Paul's day thought that Jesus could not be God because Jesus died hanging on a tree, and Deuteronomy 21:23 pronounced a curse on any man hanging on a tree. The idea of "Christ crucified" was a "stumbling block to Jews" (1 Cor. 1:23). One can read the Muslim stumbling over this same block in writings like the popular Islamic tract, "Christian-Muslim Dialogue" authored by H. M. Baagil and published in 1984 by the Revival of Islamic Heritage Society. On page 45 we read,

To believe in his death on the cross discredits his prophethood... It also stamps him as accursed (May Allah forbid!) according to Deuteronomy 21:22-23: "...for he that is hanged is accursed of God..."

Yet Paul learned, and taught, that the death of Christ on the cross was the crux of faith. It is why life is worth living. It is the good news of how we conquer death (1 Cor. 15). Paul clarifies this in Galatians writing that living by the Law puts everyone under the curse of the Law. You sin; you die! There is life, however, in the Jesus *took the curse of the saved when he died on the cross*. Yes, Jesus was

¹⁴ Actually Jesus didn't die, according to the Qur'an. Rather it was a shadow of Jesus, with God taking him to heaven before his death. See, 4.157-158.

cursed on the cross. That is the magnificence of the gospel message. If Jesus doesn't take our curse, we are left with it! Paul address this Muslim/Jewish concern this way:

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them." Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"— so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith (Gal. 3:10-14).

The simple dismissal of Christian Scripture as "inaccurate" is difficult for anyone who closely examines the texts. The findings of so many ancient copies of the Bible make this a seriously difficult argument to make for anyone who is truly researching and comparing the antiquities of the texts.

St. John of Damascus made much the same point in the decades immediately after Muhammad's death asking, "How did the book come down to your prophet?" The reply was that Muhammad received it in his sleep, at which point John applied an old adage that his followers were "spinning in their sleep." We might word it this way in more modern idiomatic translation:

St John: How did Muhammad get his book?

Muslim reply: It came to him in dreams.

St John: Dream on!

CONVERSION

Not surprisingly, with such stark differences in the life and death of Christ (and without a physical resurrection taught by Muhammad), the doctrines on salvation are quite different. Christian doctrine teaches that one is saved by grace through faith. Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-10:

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

The “grace” that Paul writes of is the death of Christ for our sins, a death that we share by faith, bringing us into the resurrected Jesus for a new life. Christianity teaches that through Adam, sin came into the world and spread to all born of Adam. (Rom. 5:12). So everyone, even Abraham in the Old Testament, who has salvation or forgiveness of sins, does so by faith (Rom. 4 -5).

For Islam, peace with God comes from surrendering to God (the very meaning of “Islam”). Yet, for the Christian it is more direct. Peace with God is found through a forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. Paul explained it in Romans 5:1,

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God *through our Lord Jesus Christ*.

To become a Christian, one puts faith or trust into the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as atonement for sin. To the Christian, sin is a very real issue, an impediment that precludes fellowship with a perfect God. The sin must be put to death. A new life without sin must exist. That is the work done by God in Jesus. Jesus, fully God and fully man, dies with the sins of humanity and resurrects into a new life. Faith is the means by which humans can share in the death and resurrection. In Jesus, sins are actually forgiven and an eternal life is found.

The path to Christianity is an individual choice. It is not something one inherits by birth. Not so with Islam. Like Judaism, one can convert to Islam, but most are born into it. One born to Muslim parents is a Muslim.

To convert to Islam, one is required to make a faith proclamation as well, the first of the five pillars or holy prescriptions of Islam.¹⁵ But, the Muslim faith proclamation is not in Jesus. It is in the unity of God and the role of Muhammad. A Muslim convert proclaims, “There is no God but God, and Muhammad is the messenger of God” before two male witnesses. That is the conversion process that makes one a Muslim.¹⁶

When The Qur’an speaks of Jesus, much of what it says is correct, yet that which is most important, the atoning sacrifice, is missing. The Qur’an teaches that:

- Jesus was born of Mary (“O Mary, God has chosen you and purified you, chosen you over the women of all peoples” 3:42).

¹⁵ Gabriel Mandel Kahn, *Muhammad the Prophet* (Thunder Bay Press 2001) at 70.

¹⁶ Yousuf Lalljee, *Know Your Islam* (Tahrike Tarsile Qur’an, Inc. 2003) p. 19.

- Jesus was virgin born (“She said, ‘My Lord! How can I have a son, when no man has touched me?’” 3:47).
- At one point, the Qur’an evens calls Jesus the Messiah (“O Mary, God gives you good news of a word from God, named the Messiah, Jesus Son of Mary, honored in the world and the hereafter, and one of the intimates of God” 3:45).

As mentioned before, however, the Qur’an does not teach the atoning death of Jesus. In fact, as recounted in the Qur’an, it was not Jesus who was actually crucified! The Qur’an recounts the supposed crucifixion referencing those who said,

“We killed the Messiah Jesus, Son of Mary, messenger of God,” whereas they did not kill him, they did not crucify him, although it was made to seem thus to them. As for those who differ on this, they are certainly in doubt about it. They have no knowledge about it, only following conjecture; but they surely did not kill him: rather God raised him up to the divine presence. (4:157-158)

Instead of Jesus dying on the cross,¹⁷ God takes Jesus up into Paradise, much like Enoch in the Old Testament (“God said, ‘Jesus, I will take you unto Myself, and I will elevate you to Me.’” 3:55).

Muhammad did not have a concept of original sin or the Christian view of the fall of man. The Qur’an teaches that man makes choices to sin or live righteously. “Mankind was created with freedom of choice, and since the beginning of the human race our Creator has chosen certain excellent individuals to inform mankind of God’s message and how to choose between right and wrong.”¹⁸ Missing is any teaching like Paul’s that we are all sinners (Rom. 3:9-10: “Jew and Gentile alike are all under sin...There is no one righteous, not even one”). The Qur’an does not teach the need for a price to be paid. Rather, it teaches that God forgives certain sin based on repentance and God’s forgiving nature. “To those who’ve done wrong in ignorance then repented and made amends thereafter – your Lord is most forgiving after that, most merciful” (16:119).

¹⁷ There is debate over this by some. While most see the Qur’an as not teaching a death and resurrection of Jesus, some believe that the Qur’an actually teaches his death referencing another passage where Jesus reportedly told Mary, “And peace is upon me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I am resurrected alive.’ That was Jesus, Son of Mary” (19:33-34). Here, the ambiguity of the Qur’an makes it difficult to determine exactly what is taught or whether there is an inconsistency.

¹⁸ Lalljee at 21.

Without original sin and without an atoning sacrifice, the Qur'an teaches a salvation that is works based. "One day every soul will come and debate about itself, and each soul will be paid in full for what it did" (16:111). This is opposite of the Christian doctrine of forgiveness based on the finished work of Christ. In his handbook that educates people in Islam, Lalljee teaches, God "will reward or punish any person according to his deeds."¹⁹

To the Christian, the judgment day is not a day where eternal destiny is based on works *as long as one has placed faith in Christ*. It is only those without faith that stand before God with their sin. For those in Christ, the sins have already been forgiven. The debt has been paid in full. This is the gospel of Paul, "Christ died for our sins" and "by this gospel you are saved" (1 Cor. 15:2-3).

CHURCH

In Acts 2, we read that those who became Christians, those who repented and put their faith in Jesus, were baptized into his church (Acts 2:41 "Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about 3,000 were added to their number that day"). The Greek for church, *ekklesia*, references as "assembly." The church is a fellowship of believers (Acts 2:42 "They devoted themselves to fellowship..."). It is a family related to each other and to God through Jesus Christ (Heb. 13:1 "Keep on loving each other as brothers"). It is the chosen people of God, the children of Abraham by faith as opposed to genetics (Rom. 4:16 "the promise comes by faith...and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring – not only to those who are of the law but also to those that are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all").

As a united people, we assemble together to encourage one another (Heb. 10:25 "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another...") and to worship God. We sing songs, read scripture, pray, and listen to sermons (1 Cor. 14:26 "When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation ..."). We give offerings (1 Cor. 16:1 "On the first day of the week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income") and we partake in sacraments, the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, remembering his death until he comes again (1 Cor. 11:17-26 "When you come together...whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes...").

Here, the Muslim faith is quite different. A Muslim does not have a "church" per se. There are no real denominational differences, although there are different sects

¹⁹ Lalljee at 21.

or branches of Islam (see, for example, the last lesson and the explanation of the Sunni /Shi'ite differences). Often, these different sects will come to the same place for their prayers. The services are not “doctrinal” (*i.e.*, they do not teach or practice differently depending on some particular beliefs of one Islam group or another). Instead, Muslim gatherings are mainly for prayer.

Generally only once a week will their services have a teaching or “sermon” (usually during the Friday services). They do not worship corporately in song, nor do they take communion. There is not really any clergy in the sense that Christian churches have clergy.²⁰ To a Muslim, a modern Christian worship service would be more like a concert and lecture, with only the few prayers considered “worship.”

Muslims are to pray five times a day. These prayers are (1) between dawn and daybreak, (2) when the sun passes its zenith, (3) in late afternoon, (4) at sunset, and (5) at the onset of night. Before prayer, a Muslim is to wash. Then, the Muslim expresses intent to pray and raises his hands proclaiming “*Allahu akbar*” (Arabic for “God is great”). The Qur’an is recited and the individual then kneels on a prayer rug prostrating himself before God and praising God while asking for forgiveness. The believer then kneels and speaks various formulas completing the first of several cycles. When the cycles are all done, the person turns his head and says, “*Al Salam alaykum wa Raamat al-Lah*” (“Peace be unto you all, and the mercy of God and His bounties.”)²¹

In Christianity, Jesus tells us to pray as he taught us (The Lord’s Prayer is found in Mt. 5:9-13). Paul adds that we are to “pray continuously” (1 Thess. 5:17), conveying an attitude of conversation with and reliance on God. These are prayers where instead of worrying, “in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,” we present “our requests to God” (Phil. 4:6).

RIGHTEOUS LIVING

As one might expect from a faith that is works based, Islam has a great deal to say about how one should live righteously. The Muslim life is to be one of obedience

²⁰ Different branches of Islam believe differently in the teachers or instructors of the faith. Among the Shi’ites are a group known as “Twelvers.” These people believe that there were twelve perfect people since Muhammad that are considered “Imams” or leaders to guide Muslims in understanding their faith. These people list the first eleven Imams as historical people, but the twelfth (named Muhammad al-Mahdi) is considered invisible until God reveals him at the end of the age.

²¹ See Lalljee at 205-239.

to God, Muhammad, and leaders (“O you who believe! Obey God, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you.” 4:59).

Christianity teaches obedience to God first, recognizing that only God is good and anyone else is fallible. Within that recognition, however, we are to honor and follow our leaders in Christ, but never when those leaders transgress God or the gospel.

The Qur’an announces punishment for those who “annoy God and His Messenger.” They are cursed “in this world and in the Hereafter” (33:57). Obviously, this is not a concern in Christianity. No prophet is held in such esteem that to “annoy” him would bring punishment in the Christian faith. Only God is worshipped (something Islam affirms as well). The reason we worship Jesus is not because he was a prophet. It is because he is God! Any prophet is simply a fallen human being that God has chosen to use, in spite of their human frailties and sins.

The Qur’an teaches honesty in transactions (“Give full measure when you measure, and weigh with a balance that is straight.” 17:35). In this teaching, Christianity is the same.

The Qur’an teaches against intoxicants (alcohol) and gambling. “O you who believe! Intoxicants and gambling...are an abomination of Satan’s handiwork. Eschew such that you may prosper” (5:93). Christianity teaches against drunkenness and irresponsible stewardship, but has no absolute prohibition against any alcohol or gambling.

The Qur’an teaches strongly in many places about the need to be charitable. Charity and the rights of the underprivileged and downtrodden are themes constantly stressed. It is one of the reasons countries with great poverty have people that so readily embrace the Islamic faith. Christianity teaches the importance of the same. Christians are given special instructions to tend to the needy and underprivileged. (For both Islam and Christianity, we are talking here about what is taught, not necessarily what is always done!).

We have left out of this lesson the issues surrounding Muslim evangelism and use of the sword. There are significant differences among many in the Muslim world on these points. Some teach warfare as the requirement of the faith, while others teach that warfare is only appropriate when defending oneself. The Qur’an is used to support both approaches.

A point worth making in the “just war” debate is that in contemporary Christian circles, a religious war is not justified whereas in Islam, it is the

ONLY justification for war. Thus, the radicals have to make a war religious to justify the violence.²²

Here, we return to the principle that different sections of Islam follow different beliefs, much like we have seen in Christian history when we look at the Catholic/Protestant discord in Ireland and other places.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth”* (2 Tim. 2:15).

“Truth” is a critical word to Christians. We treasure it as a word we apply to Jesus himself. (“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life” – Jn 14:6). The claims of the Christian faith are ones that merit not only awareness, but study. We have in the Scriptures words that attest to the truth of God, of people, of Christ and salvation. Let us make studying those things of paramount importance in this life.

2. *“Now brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you have received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you...that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day”* (1 Cor. 15:1-2).

This point for home was in last week’s lesson. This week, we emphasize from it that this is the gospel or good news by which we are saved! We have peace with God through the death of Christ. We submit to God through the death of Christ. This is our affirmation in word and deed!

3. *“For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified”* (1 Cor. 2:2).

Jesus crucified is the final product. There is no more God can do. There is no more I can do. Jesus Messiah crucified is the core that gives life meaning and informs all we say and do. May we proclaim this in our lives daily, bearing fruit to his Kingdom.

²² Evertt Huffard in private correspondence. Dr. Huffard is Professor of Missiology of Harding School of Theology with his Phd in Christian-Muslim encounter from Fuller Theological Seminary.

HOMEWORK

To recap, we are memorizing 1 John this year in the English Standard Version. That amounts to two verses a week. To be current, we need to have memorized 1 John 1:1-3:17. This week we add 1 John 3:18-19. We provide all verses below for your help!

1:1 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— **2** the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us— **3** that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. **4** And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. **6** If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. **7** But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. **8** If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. **9** If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. **10** If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

2:1 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. **2** He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. **3** And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. **4** Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in

him, 5 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: **6** whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. **7** Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. **8** At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. **9** Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. **10** Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. **11** But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

12 I am writing to you, little children,
because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake.

13 I am writing to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I am writing to you, young men,
because you have overcome the evil one.

I write to you, children,
because you know the Father.

14 I write to you, fathers,
because you know him who is from the beginning.

I write to you, young men,
because you are strong,
and the word of God abides in you,
and you have overcome the evil one.

15 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. **16** For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from

the Father but is from the world. **17** And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

18 Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. **19** They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us. **20** But you have been anointed by the Holy One, and you all have knowledge. **21** I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and because no lie is of the truth. **22** Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. **23** No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. **24** Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. **25** And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.

26 I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. **27** But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him. **28** And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. **29** you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

3:1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. **2** Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he

appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. **3** And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. **4** Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. **5** You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. **6** No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. **7** Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. **8** Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. **9** No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning because he has been born of God. **10** By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

11 For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. **12** We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. **13** Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. **14** We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. **15** Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

16 By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. **17** But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? **18** Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.

19 By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our heart before him;