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# Religion: The Claim of Islam

## Colossians 1:9-23

**Introduction** Imagine someone said to you, “With accuracy and integrity, describe the whole of Christian thought.” An accurate representation would require you to think carefully about what is essential to Christianity, where it comes from, how it is understood, how it is splintered and how it governs different groups. And you have to do it in 30-45 minutes.

Well, this is my challenge tonight. It would be impossible to accurately represent Islam as a whole in such a way that any branch of it would wholly agree. But, I have chosen to try to familiarize you with the core essentials of the Islamic Religion and then help you to be able to interact intelligently with Moslems from its various sects and spheres. Two things that you will note in my own way of expressing all this. I will never refer to the Qur'an as a Holy Book. I will not refer to Islamic theologians: they may be Islamic scholars or Islamists, but they are not theologians for they are not thinking of the true God.

So, let us bow before the true God of heaven, Yahweh, Elohim, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jesus, the Lord Christ and ask that the Divine, Holy Spirit will help us to understand, fuel compassion and frame our convictions.

### The Source of Islamic Doctrine

Where does Islam derive its doctrine and practice from?

#### The Qur'an

The Qur'an is the final authoritative source for Islamic thought and practice. It was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. He received most of it in visions and ecstatic states. He recited them to trained rememberers.

The Qur'an was written down in short proverbs or verses, grouped by Surahs or chapters. They were organized from longest to shortest. The proverbs are often enigmatic and yielding of more than one interpretation.

The Qur'an therefore is perfect, without error and the full disclosure of Allah. Yet, it is full of contradictions and inconsistencies that cannot be explained by historical development. Much of Islamic philosophy and thought is an interaction with the texts.

#### The Hadith

Due to the organization and enigmatic nature of the Qur'an, after the prophet's death, there began a compilation of the prophet's sayings and examples. These are known as the Hadith and the Sunnah.

The Hadith is the foundational and authoritative interpretive tool for understanding the Qur'an. It is a collection of narrations from the life of Muhammad. This collection, made over 300 years, provides the prophet's own commentary on the

Qur'an. There are volumes of the Hadith which attempt to interpret, explain, synthesize and apply the Qur'an. The authoritative Hadith is the one compiled by Sahih Bukhari who lived between 810-870. Much that we recognize as the practice of Islam arises from the Hadith. Just a note, many Islamists will discuss the Hadith and include the Sunnah as a distinct part, rather than as a separate item.

Nearly every aspect of a Moslem's life is guided by the Hadith. Some of the sayings of the prophet are so culturally bound it is hard to see how it applies in modern life. Further, there are statements made that simply are not true to fact. This forces Islamists to distinguish between the Qur'an as perfect and the Hadith as being true at the point of its giving.

## **The Shari'ah**

The Shari'ah is the foundational Islamic Law governing life and practice. It is developed from the Sunnah. The Sunnah is a collection of examples from the life of Muhammad as to how he understood and practiced the Qur'an. It gives a biographical sketch of Muhammad. It provides what we might think of as case law, actual examples to be thought about and applied in practical life. It includes, for the more scrupulous of Moslems, that extending the left hand to shake is an insult and the forbidding of breads made with lard.

The Shari'ah governs the life of an individual Moslem. It will be the guide for Moslem community life and will be preached in the Mosque and enforced where possible. Many strict Moslems will be deeply offended by the insults defined by the Shari'ah (Sunnah) even when they well know an infidel is offering no insult.

The Shari'ah will also be expected to govern a Moslem nation. The logic is inescapable where there is no distinction between religion and culture. So, Islamic governments will be expected to enforce the Shari'ah as much as possible. Certainly, there are all sorts of variations in the interpretations and applications in a national setting, but conservative Imam's will preach, exhort and call for as strict an interpretation and enforcement as possible. This will particularly be so in either a marginally Islamic nation or in one compromising with western culture.

## **The Imam and Ijma**

The final layer of Islamic thought is in the Imam and Ijma. These two sources of binding interpretation and application are the result of the great split in Islam. This split has come down through history creating two very different groups of Moslems following different leadership and each claiming to be the true faith.

For one sect of Muslims, there is a single, authoritative leader who holds the office of Imam. He is supposed to be the direct descendent of one of the early Caliphs and is appointed by succession. The Imam would function in this branch of Islam much like the Pope does in Catholicism. He is its spiritual leader and can make pronouncements that are binding on all Shi'ite Muslims.

The other major sect of Muslims rely on the Ijma to interpret and apply Islamic law to local settings. The Ijma is that which is decided or is the deciding by consensus of the local community of Muslims. Usually this is accomplished by meetings of Muslim clerics whose deliberations represent the opinions of their

respective Mosques or communities. The effect of this in Sunni Muslims is that different Sunni communities may have very different local practices. Thus many Sunni communities in Africa accept and practice female circumcision, a practice rejected by almost all western Sunni Muslims.

## **The Structure of Islamic Thought**

A brief overview of key and common Islamic doctrines will be helpful. As in all summaries, there is much that will be left out. The point here is to try to show how Islamic thought is structured by their core beliefs.

### **Allah**

Allah is their word for the one and only Divine Being. Allah is their god. As a monotheistic religion, Allah's attributes are borrowed from Yahweh's. Allah is to be submitted to and obeyed without question. He is the only true god and there is no other. All peoples are to acknowledge him, either by conversion or by forced submission.

I refer you to the material in *Unveiling Islam* by Ergun Mehmet Caner and Emir Fethi Caner, p.108-117. There they discuss the nature and names of Allah as drawn from the Qur'an and the Hadith.

### **Unity**

Absolutely fundamental to Islam is the doctrine of unity, the absolute oneness of Allah and the real oneness of all Moslem people. The most important of these is the oneness of Allah. Their false god is not only a single god (therefore they technically oppose polytheism and idolatry) but is the only god. It is hard for the average, pluralistic westerner and sometimes even some Christians to understand the emotions connected to this idea.

Secondly, there is the oneness of all true Muslims. They are connected to one another through their submission to Allah and belief in Muhammad. Since the Hadith and Shari'ah proscribe every facet of Muslim life, Muslims all over the world have a visible, shared culture and lifestyle. Muslims are gathered in local communities/congregations called *umma*. Again, this concept is so important to understand how our encouraging of many separate Islamic states in the Mid East is perceived as an attack on Islam, on its power as a unified whole.

### **Muhammad**

Muhammad is revered as the final mediator of the revelation of Allah. To him and through him, Allah gave the Qur'an. His words and deeds as recorded in the Sunnah and Hadith establish the definitive interpretation and application of the Qur'an. His life as a perfect model of Islam including the exemptions granted to him by Allah to do what is normally forbidden, all point to his office as the great prophet. Muslim's will generally venerate Muhammad and defend him with a passion and emotion that will seem strange to us. Yet the reality was that he may have been demon possessed, had bizarre episodes that we would label as being bi-polar, and seizures. He was as enigmatic as the revelations he gave. He could love with single minded loyalty his first wife and then violate the Qur'an by ha-

ing more than 4 wives including consummating his marriage when one wife was 9 years old.

## **Salvation**

Islam is a religion of works. While the doctrine of salvation in Islam is convoluted and confusing, one thing is certain – the merit of the person who professes and practices Islam is what gains entrance into paradise. What is interesting is that Allah accepts the good works only because of his supposed mercy, not because the good works are meritorious on their own. So a true Muslim's hope and confidence, his eternal security is grounded in the mercy of Allah who accepts the good works offered.

Clearly, in their system of false religion, infidels – those who deny Islam and the unfaithful – those who are not faithful to the Islam they profess – will all be consigned to hell. Those who confess Islam, the first good work and then carry out the five pillars will have their good works accepted by the mercy of God.

## **Paradise**

Paradise is the state of blessedness and place of pleasures attained after one's death. In the Qur'an it is mostly described as a lush tropical place of waters, riches and sexual pleasures. Paradise is simply the opposite of the terrible hardships and deprivation of desert and nomadic life. Paradise is assured to martyrs, particularly to those who die in a jihad.

## **The Five Pillars**

Islam has five fundamental religious rites. These are called, *The Five Pillars*. These are the major rallying points and are simply to be believed, never questioned or challenged. To criticize or deny the five pillars is to commit treason and blasphemy, punishable by death.

### ***Shahada* – The Creed**

This is the foundational affirmation required of every Muslim. It simply states that Allah is the true god and Muhammad is his messenger. It must be memorized and repeated in Arabic. It is repeated in the ears of newborns, repeated at prayers through their lives and at every significant event and hopefully, at their death.

### ***Salat* – The Prayers**

Five calls to prayer are required of all Muslims. These are carefully defined in content and form. They are to be prayed at the prescribed times, laying prostrate on ones face facing Mecca if possible. It is not communication with a personal God; there is no such thing in Islam. It is an expression of complete submission and humiliation before Allah. Few Muslims actually practice the rigors of these prayers, particularly in the west. The *salat* is also practiced in the Mosque and in other times of ordered worship.

### **Ramadan – The Fast**

Islamic fasting the abstinence from eating, drinking, smoking and sex for 1 hour before sunrise to sunset for one lunar month called Ramadan, or the western month of February. While fasting at other times and on other occasions is both required and allowed, the Ramadan fast is required of all the faithful.

### **Zakat – The Almsgivings**

Islamic giving to the poor is a foundational tenant of the faith. Islamic charity and support of the faith, its mosques and causes is required of all Muslims. In much of the Islamic world, the sharing of wealth as a fundamental of the faith has turned many Islamic states into socialist counties. Saudi Arabia is a prime example of this.

### **Hajj – Pilgrimage**

All Muslims, at least once in their life, should make the pilgrimage to Mecca. This is more than just a trip to a city, but a long series of steps and stops that follow the flight of Muhammad and culminate in the worship in an ecstatic worship at the Kaaba in Mecca and kissing of the Black Stone there.

## **Jihad**

Jihad is the Islamic word for the struggle against evil, or *holy war*. At the individual level, this is the struggle against one's own evil and against evil in one's own surroundings. This use of the word in the Qur'an and in the Hadith/Sunnah is very minimal. Jihad has historically and publicly almost exclusively used to refer to the war against the infidels, the evil unbelievers. Jihad is the confrontation or war that defends or expands the good of Islam versus the evil of unbelief. A *Fatwa* is a jihad declared against a particular enemy, the *akafir*.

Regardless of the present popular Political Correctness police and the full-court press by both pluralists and Islamists, jihad refers primarily if not exclusively to some level of religious war. If the whole earth is the property of Allah, then it makes perfect sense to conquer it for Allah. If Islamic religion-culture is being threatened by western culture/commerce/depravity, then jihad is an aggressive defense against its demise. Without question, terrorists like Bin Laden can accurately quote and authoritatively apply both the Qur'an and Hadith to justify their actions. While they might be in a minority at present, they certainly stand in a long tradition of Islamic history, law and warfare.

In talking with a Muslim who loves peace, it is important to challenge the idea of Islam as a religion of peace while not accusing them of being a war-mongering terrorist. It is best to point out that they are simply inconsistent with what their religion teaches and in the end, demands.

## **Law**

Islamic Law simply governs all of life and when possible by national law. I am emphasizing this because this is very difficult for us as westerners to get this in our heads. Intolerance of other religions, particular ones that reject Islam outright and challenge Islamic doctrine, is the universal practice of Islamic states. One Is-

Islamic scholar has written, "There can be neither peace nor co-existence between the Islamic religion and non-Islamic social and political institutions. ...When the Islamic movement is strong enough it must take power and create an Islamic republic."<sup>1</sup> Make no mistake that Islam requires and demands that once it is a majority or is in power, Islamic law must be enforced at all levels. Thus, Salmon Rushdie, who has been tried and convicted of treason, is under an irrevocable death sentence with a present \$2 million dollar reward for his execution (murder).

## **The Streams of Islamic Development**

Over their long history, Muslims have divided over their understanding of Islam. This has given rise to our present situation of having 3 major Islamic sects and other minor ones. I am arranging them on a continuum from mystic to liberal.

### **Sufis**

The Sufis are the mystics of Islam. They are a very definite and extreme conservative minority who often not even recognized by other Islamic sects. Some westerners are familiar with the Whirling Dervishes as Sufi mysticism.

### **Shi'ites**

The Shi'ites are the conservatives of Islam. The original split involved following an authoritative leadership and has further developed into a much more strict interpretation and application of Islam. The Islam that is violent has been cultivated mostly within the Shi'ite sects.

### **Sunnis**

The Sunnis are the moderates of Islam. The majority of Muslims are Sunnis with current estimates place at around 90%. They tend to have conservative interpretations and moderate to liberal applications of Islam. The Sunnis tend to accept jihad yet reject terrorism.

### **Secularists**

The secularists are the liberals of Islam. While they want to be Islamic and worship Allah, they reject Islamic law as binding on them. Most secularists want to live as either moderns or westerners while still worshipping Allah and being recognized as Muslims, in the faith. Many of the Muslims you will meet will either be Sunni or Secularist – most will claim to be Sunni and will live like secularists.

### **Sects**

Islam is also filled with minor sects. Among these are the Wahhabis, a very strict sect that has declared jihad against all other sects as corrupting Islam. Another of the minor sect is the black Nation of Islam which exists almost exclusively in the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1997, p.269.

## **The Spheres of Islamic Domination**

Islamic thought recognizes two modes of Islamic practice and life. Understand that these are generally thought of phases with a desire and drive to move from the first to the second mode.

### **Mecca Mode**

The first is the Mecca mode in which Muslims live as a minority in non-Islamic cultures and nations. This corresponds to Muhammad's practice while he lived in Mecca. In this mode, Muslims are to recognize religious tolerance, to win converts and to influence society through the cultural and political structures in place. They are to be passive and to simply live out their Muslim faith without trying to give offense. In the west, all Muslims are living in this mode. This is why most you will encounter will denounce terrorism and Islamic extremes. They will often be very moral, family centered, religious and scrupulous in their behavior.

### **Medina Mode**

The second mode is the Medina Mode in which Muslims live as a majority in an Islamic culture or an Islamic nation. This corresponds to Muhammad's practice while he lived in Medina. In this mode, Islam is the only allowed religion and culture. All others may exist, but not visibly. In this mode, it will be dominant and aggressive, enforcing Islamic religion and culture by force of law.

Just as Muhammad moved from Mecca to Medina, it is the desire of Mecca mode Islam to move to Medina mode – to follow the prophet from a minority role to a governing, ruling role.

## **A Strategy for Christian Response**

I want to spend just a moment thinking about a strategy to engage Islam as Christians. This will set the stage for Pastor Dan to talk about Muslim conversion next week.

### **The God of the Bible**

Never under any circumstances should we equate the God of the Bible with Allah. Do not use the term Allah to refer to Yahweh when talking with a Muslim. If necessary, call Him Yahweh to be sure that both you and the Muslim recognize that *you are not talking about the same being*. The God of the Bible is the only one true God, a Trinity and Jesus Christ is His Divine Son, deity and God of very God yet became man. It is wrong and fatal to say that Muslims are ignorantly worshipping the God of the Bible under the name of Allah. No true Muslim who has any knowledge of his religion is thinking of the God of the Bible when they are thinking, talking or praying to Allah.

### **The Deity of Christ**

The idea of the Deity of Christ is repugnant to Moslems. When we assert this, we are asserting that Jesus is the full expression of God and the final revelation of God. He is both God and man. No one who denies the deity of Christ is saved. A Muslim thinks that when we assert the deity of Christ that we are no longer monotheists. This brings me to something that you commonly hear said: Christianity, Judaism and Islam are the three great monotheist religions. Neither Judaism nor Islam recognize this as so – both view New Testament Christians as not being monotheists. Secondly, this statement puts them all on par as religions. Islam and Judaism are false religions. Salvation is not in them. While there are those who claim to be a Messianic Judaism and a Messianic Islam, both are false. Jesus the fulfillment of the Messiah as promised in the Old Testament – but He is King over all His people in the church, Jew and Gentile. The idea of a Messianic Islam is absurd.

### **The Crucifixion of Christ**

Islam denies that Jesus was crucified. It teaches that he was rescued and taken up to paradise. This is the clear teaching of the Qur'an and the Hadith. The Bible and historical record stands against this. Muslims must recognize that either the Qur'an is wrong or the Bible and much historical testimony is wrong.

### **The Lordship of Christ**

What is denied that makes Islam false is their rejection of the Lordship of Christ. He alone is Lord – not Allah, not Muhammad, not the Qur'an, not the Hadith. Yes, we need to be kind. But we have to be clear in our own minds that if we do not tell Muslims the truth, then they will die and go to hell. Stand firm with grace and true love.



## **Conclusion**

- ✦ Islam is a false religion
- ✦ Islam is a religion of works
- ✦ Islam is a religion aiming to dominate and rule
- ✦ Moslems often do not know their religion as whole
- ✦ Moslems often are very passionate about their beliefs and emotional when opposed
- ✦ Any Moslem who believes and bows, calling on the Name of the Lord, will be saved.

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## Notes