

A Christian Apologetic to Islam

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Islam is a major theistic religion with an estimated 1.1 billion followers who control over three-dozen countries worldwide. Islam's staggering rate of growth over the last century, often through political or military means, far exceeds the growth of Christianity in many areas of the world. This is not merely a concern for missionaries and politicians, however. In the past few years many highly educated and very devout Islamic students and families have immigrated to the United States, including many who work, study, and teach in the Dallas Metroplex. Many of these local followers of Islam (known as Muslims) are able to

easily outwit the Christians who share the gospel with them, for they have prepared well for their lives in this "Christian" nation. For this reason, the religion of Islam presents one of the most difficult apologetic encounters a Christian in America may face. And as the number of Muslims in the United States increases, the need for Christians to be well-trained and ready to witness and defend the faith within a Muslim context will grow.

This paper will attempt to briefly summarize the background, beliefs, and practices of the Islamic faith and then present the most crucial apologetic arguments and techniques a Christian can use in sharing his faith with a Muslim.

Background

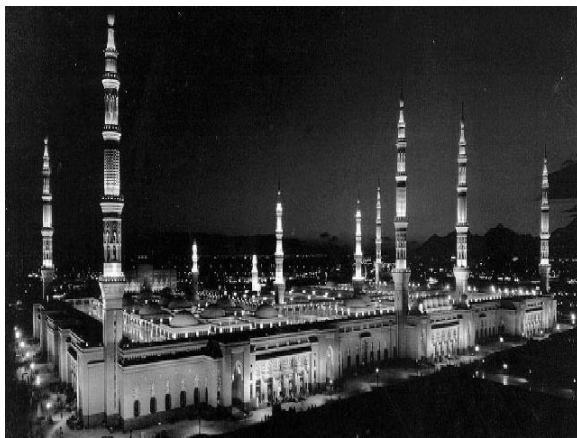
The religion of Islam traces its roots to an Arabic man named Muhammad born in 570 AD in the city of Mecca in present day Saudi Arabia. Mecca was a prosperous trading hub and the religious center of Arab paganism; yet Muhammad enjoyed little of the wealth, losing his parents early in life and growing up as an impoverished orphan among his relatives. However, hard work as a caravan leader earned him the hand in marriage of a wealthy older widow at the age of 25. Suddenly rich and influential, Muhammad had time to ponder and pursue his growing religious convictions. He often fasted, sought solitude in caves, and was prone to dreams. As he withdrew further from business and family, he became increasingly



Mecca, Saudi Arabia

dissatisfied with the polytheism and crude superstitions of his native Mecca and grew in his conviction that there was only one true and transcendent God.

This religious growth culminated in Muhammad's first vision when, at the age of 40, the angel Gabriel visited him while in seclusion on Mt. Hira, commanding him to publicly proclaim a message from God that would be imprinted upon his heart. Muhammad at first doubted whether this messenger was truly from God or was demonic instead. However, Gabriel reassured him by calling out from heaven "Thou art the messenger of God, and I am Gabriel." With further encouragement from his wife, Muhammad came to believe that he was indeed God's messenger and began to publicly preach on the street corners of Mecca, calling on the Arab traders to submit to the one true God, Allah, and to turn from their sinful ways. However, persecution rapidly mounted against Muhammad's message and eventually forced he and his followers from Mecca to the town of Medina in 622. This pilgrimage, known as the Hijra, is year zero of the Islamic calendar.



Medina. Saudi Arabia

In Medina, Muhammad's political power grew rapidly and the distinct religion of Islam became increasingly formalized. He began to consolidate his power base by persecuting those who would not convert to Islam, including many Jews who were expelled or executed. As his power grew, his focus returned to Mecca, the city he considered to be the center of the Islamic faith. With the help of nomadic Arab tribes, Muhammad easily conquered the pagans of Mecca in 630 AD and returned to rule. He treated his enemies relatively generously, and rapidly began to expand his

influence over the scattered tribes of Arabia. At his sudden death in 632 AD, he had succeeded in proclaiming the full message of the Islamic religion and uniting the Arab tribes around this new religious and political force. He claimed that this new religion was the product of the numerous visions he received over the course of his lifetime. However, it borrowed many religious concepts from Arabic paganism and monotheistic Judaism and Christianity.

In the years following his death, the Islamic empire grew to dominate much of the eastern world. By 750 AD, Muslims controlled an empire that included Spain and Northern Africa in the West to Afghanistan and parts of India in the East. Despite eventually losing parts of this territory, Islam has played a significant part in world-wide politics, religion, art, philosophy, and science ever since.

This amazing military conquest was often overshadowed, however, by internal struggles arising from Muhammad's failure to name a successor to his position. The various views that arose over proper transfer of power led to the most divisive and bloody internal conflicts within Islam, which continue to divide the Islamic sects even today. Approximately 90% of Muslims worldwide belong to the Sunnite sect, a relatively moderate group who accept only the four leaders who directly followed

Muhammad. Followers of the second largest sect, the Shia'ites, practice a more literal form of religious interpretation and application, and follow a continual line of leaders, the Ayatollahs. Numerous other smaller sects have separated from these two primary groups based on differing religious beliefs and practices, such as the Sufi mystics and the Baha'i Faith.

Today, Islam is far more than just a religious system. In many Muslim countries, Islam controls religious life, political law, family relationships, and culture. This convergence of religion and politics carries heavy penalties for converting from Islam to any other faith, including persecution, imprisonment, and often death. For this reason, Muslims are perhaps the most difficult group to convert to Christianity.



Islamic Wedding Ceremony

Islamic Beliefs

Six Articles of Faith

The word Islam is an Arabic noun meaning “to submit, surrender or commit oneself.” Those who follow Islam are referred to as Muslims, another word derived from the same Arabic noun meaning “the one who submits”. These titles aptly describe the central beliefs of the Islamic faith, which are summarized by Islamic scholars in the following six Articles of Faith.

1. **God.** There is only one God and his name is Allah. This is the most central belief of Islam, and makes the Christian trinity unthinkable. He is uncreated, all-powerful, all-knowing, and the sovereign judge. He is not a personal or relational God, for he is so far above man in every way that he is personally unknowable and unapproachable by sinful man. He is the creator, and on the awful day of judgment, he alone will destroy the world yet save the faithful. His attributes of judgment, power, and mercy are stressed while love and grace are often ignored.
2. **Angels.** Muslims affirm the existence of angels, who are intelligent creatures, created of light, who do not possess free will, and who have a multitude of duties to fulfill. Each man or woman has two recording angels: one to record his good deeds, and the other his bad. Also, Muslims believe in creatures called jinn who are similar to angels, yet possess free will and can reproduce. Satan is one of these creatures who chose evil and was used by Allah to tempt mankind.

3. **Scripture**. Muslims hold to four books as inspired by Allah: the Torah of Moses, the Psalms of David, the Gospel of Jesus, and the Qur'an (or Koran) containing Muhammad's visions. As Allah's final revelation, the Qur'an supercedes all the other books. Islam teaches that Jews and Christians corrupted the first three of these books, necessitating the fourth. To prevent similar corruption, the Qur'an was compiled shortly after Muhammad's death from fragments of his teachings recorded on palm leaves, camel shoulder bones, and stones which were then destroyed, leaving a single, authoritative version. Furthermore, no translations from the original Arabic are authorized, ensuring that all Muslim scholars continue to use the same, original version. The Qur'an is nearly as long as the New Testament and divided into 114 chapters (called surahs).



Islamic scholar reading Qu'ran

4. **Prophets**. Muslims believe that Allah has spoken through numerous prophets through the centuries. The six greatest are Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, the last and greatest of Allah's messengers.
5. **Last Days**. Islam teaches that in the last days, all men and women will be resurrected and judged by Allah based on their deeds. Those who followed and obeyed Allah and Muhammad will enter a heavenly paradise of sensual pleasure while the rest will be tormented forever in Hell.
6. **Predestination**. Muslims hold that everything that happens, both good and evil, is directly predestined by Allah's will. Even Muslim scholars admit that Allah is the author of evil and that he, at his whim, can predestine a person to heaven or hell regardless of their faithfulness to Islam.

Five Pillars of Islam

Based on the above beliefs, what duties are required of a Muslim to be accepted by God when he dies? Islam teaches the following practices, the Five Pillars, that every Muslim must faithfully perform to potentially enter heaven.

1. **The Creed**. The first words that a Muslim baby will hear, and often the last words a Muslim will say before death are "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah." A person must state this central creed of the Islamic faith publicly in order to become a Muslim.

2. **Prayer**. The Muslim must recite ritualistic prayers in Arabic five times a day, facing Mecca. These prayers are accompanied by a mechanical procedure of standing, kneeling, and lying prostrate.

3. **Almsgiving**. Every Muslim must give one fortieth of his monetary income plus other forms of his wealth to the poor and destitute.

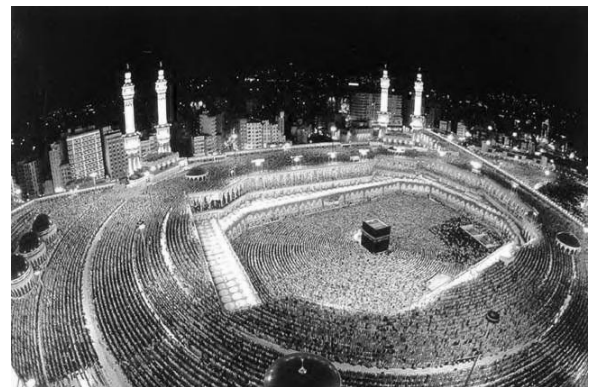


Muslim men praying in New York city

4. **Fasting**. During the month of Ramadan, Muslims must abstain from all food and drink, smoking, and sexual activity during daylight hours, though eating and drinking are permitted at night.

5. **The Pilgrimage**. Every Muslim who is physically and financially able, must go on a pilgrimage (called the Hajj) to Mecca during a specific time of the year at least once in his life.

A sixth religious duty, the Jihad or Holy War, is often included with the above, though most Muslims encountered in America would disagree. This duty requires that, if the situation warrants it, men are to go to war to spread the Islamic faith and defend it from “infidels.” A person who dies in a Jihad is considered a martyr and guaranteed eternal life in heaven.



Thousands of Muslim pilgrims on Hajj in Mecca

A Christian Defense Against Islam

Obviously, the Christian and Muslim share many religious beliefs and concepts in common. However, there are substantial differences between these faiths that must be addressed for a Muslim to see the deficiency of Islam in light of Christianity. While there are many potential apologetic topics that a Christian can discuss with a Muslim, this paper will briefly focus on the three most important issues: the nature of God, the Person of Jesus, and the nature of salvation. These issues are interrelated and will often be addressed simultaneously.

However, to discuss the Biblical view of God, Christ, and salvation, it will usually be necessary to defend the authority and inerrancy of the Bible against the Muslim’s claim that Christians and Jews have corrupted the scriptures. It is important to remind with the Muslim that the Qur’an holds a very high view of both the Old and New Testaments as revelations from God (see Surah 3:84; 6:34, 10:37,64,94; 46:12). Share with him that the Christian concepts of a loving God, of a deified Christ, and of salvation based on faith alone are developed from many sections of scripture, not merely individual verses. To say that these beliefs are incorrect due to human corruption of God’s revelation

means that the sovereign, all-powerful God Muslims worship allowed sinful men to not just corrupt a few words or verses but entire sections of His revelation to the extent that basic truths are corrupted. It simply is inconsistent to hold the view that such a God would allow such an assault on His revelation. The Christian should lead his Muslim friend through this line of thought by asking directed questions and referring to the Qur'anic descriptions of the Bible. Furthermore, the Christian can present Biblical and historic evidence for the reliability and inerrancy of the Bible. A full discussion of this topic is far beyond the scope of this paper, so please refer to the "Defense of the Bible" resources in the Works Cited section below.



Muslim girls of the Turkmen people group

The Nature of God – the Trinity

Is the God of Islam the same God Christians worship? Absolutely not. Allah differs from the God of the Bible in both His nature and His attributes. The Bible teaches that God is, by nature, a triune Being: He is the one God who has eternally existed in three co-equal persons, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Because Muhammad misunderstood how the Bible defines these terms, he labeled the doctrine of the trinity as blasphemous, believing it taught the existence of three separate gods. The Qur'an states, "They surely disbelieve who say: Lo! Allah is the third of three; when there is no God save the one God." (Surah 5:73). Muslims also misunderstand the concept of "God the Father", believing it to mean that through some sexual union, the Father must have produced the Son. Clearly, the Christian must carefully and Biblically define these terms and answer these charges. The Bible teaches that God is one and there is no other God (2 Sam 7:22; Isaiah 45:5, 21-22; 1 Cor 8:4). The Son has eternally existed with the father (John 1:1-3,14; Col 1:15-17; 2:9), and the terms "Father"

and "Son" refer to position and function, not biological reality. All three persons of the trinity are co-equal, eternal, and active in creation and redemption (Gen 1:26;11:7; Mt 3:16-17;28:19; Luke 1:35; Titus 3:4-7; Heb 1:2-3).

Allah also diverges from the Biblical portrayal of God in His attributes. He is very deficient in love, holiness, and grace and is a distant God with whom no one can have a personal relationship. Given the Islamic doctrine of extreme predestination, Allah becomes the author of both good and evil and loves only those he chooses to save, which is directly contradicted by the



Man and son at Mosque

Bible (Habakkuk 1:13; 1 Tim 2:3-4; James 1:13-17). Furthermore, the God of the Bible desires to have a personal relationship with men and women (John 1:11-14; 3:16; 15:9-15; 17:20-26; Rom 5:8) and, as the Bible specifically states, “God is love” (1 John 4:16).

The Person of Jesus Christ – His Deity and Sacrificial Death

Muslims exhibit great respect for Jesus, and agree with many Biblical teachings about Him including His virgin birth, sinless life, miracles, and current residence near to God in heaven. However, Islam does not hold that Jesus was God’s son, that he died to pay for anyone’s sins, that he was crucified or resurrected, or that he claimed any of these things. The Qur’an teaches that “Jesus...was only a messenger of Allah...Far is it removed from His transcendent majesty that He should have a son.” (Surah 4:171). It teaches that Jesus was only one of many prophets and was superceded by Muhammad. Muslims also hold that God protected Jesus from the Jews and caused Judas Iscariot to be crucified in his place, unbeknownst to either the Jews or Romans. These claims undermine the very heart of the Christian gospel and therefore present the most significant question the Christian must address. The testimony of the Old Testament prophecies (Isaiah 9:6; 7:14 [fulfilled in Mt 1:23]; Micah 5:2; Zech 9:9;11:12), of the New Testament Apostles (John 1:1-5,14,34; 20:28; Phil 2:5-11; Col 1:15-17; 2:9; Tit 2:13; Heb 1:1-4), and of Jesus Christ Himself (John 5:18;8:58 [compare to Ex 3:14];10:30,37-38;17:5; Rev 1:5-8,17-18), clearly identify Jesus Christ as the Son of God, who has existed from all eternity with God the Father as an equal Person of the triune God. Both the Old Testament and Jesus Christ Himself predicted His sacrificial death and resurrection (Isaiah 53; Ps 22:16-18; Mk 8:31; 9:31) and the New Testament describes its fulfillment (Luke 24:15-27; 1 Cor 15:3-8). There is also substantial historical evidence for the crucifixion of Jesus.

Many Muslims will be prepared for this argument and will refute the interpretation of many of Jesus’ statements and will deny that the apostle’s statements are actually scripture. If so, the resources under “Evidence for Jesus” at the end of this paper can be consulted for further proof.



Veiled Muslim women shopping in Washington, DC

The Nature of Salvation – Grace vs. Works

Christianity and Islam markedly disagree in declaring how a person can be saved from the punishment of hell. This final apologetic appeal is particularly powerful because it highlights the differences between the joyful and secure relationship a Christian has with his God in comparison to the uncertain and distant relationship a Muslim has with his Allah. The Muslim is motivated by fear to follow the five pillars of Islam to the best of his ability while not having any certain standard of how

faithful he must be to be saved. Allah is an arbitrary God of judgment who shows mercy only as he chooses. Therefore, the Muslim can truly have no assurance that he will enter heaven when he dies because he cannot possibly know if he has adequately satisfied Allah's requirements.

In contrast to this uncertain works-based system of salvation, the Bible declares salvation, security, and peace by God's grace received through faith alone. It teaches that all men are separated from God due to sin (Rom 3:10-12,23) and the necessary penalty of this sin is eternal death (Rom 1:32; 6:23). At this point, the Christian must stress that there are no works a person can ever do to earn favor with God (Is 64:6; Rom 3:19-20) for His standard is perfection (Mt 5:48). Since God is perfectly just and holy (Ex 15:11; Ps 99:2-5; Is 6:1-4), He cannot overlook the sins of man nor allow sinful man to dwell in His presence (Is 6:5; Habakkuk 1:13). Muslims will now interject that God is greatly merciful, which the Bible confirms (Ps 13:5; 17:7; Rom 11:30-32). However, God is not perfect if He compromises even one of His attributes, including justice and holiness. Therefore, He had to provide a means of saving people from the eternal punishment they deserve while still satisfying His perfect justice. This He accomplished through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ (perfectly stated in Rom 3:23-26). The Muslim needs to see that without Christ's death and resurrection, there could be no solution to his problem of sin (1 Cor 15:17-19). Present how the Bible perfectly foreshadows what

Christ must do through the Old Testament sacrificial system. God was clearly teaching His people that without "shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb 9:22). This forgiveness of sins provided through Christ's own blood is available to every person through faith and trust in Jesus Christ's provision apart from any works or deeds (Rom 3:28, Eph 2:8-9, Titus 3:5). Furthermore, the Bible teaches that all who believe will certainly be saved and can have assurance now in their future deliverance (John 10:27-29; Rom 8:35-39; 1 John 5:11-13).



Mujaheddin, Muslim freedom fighter

Practical Suggestions

The interaction between Christianity and Islam over the past 1400 years has given Muslim scholars ample opportunity to develop and refine excellent apologetic responses to the Christian faith. Many Muslims in America are highly educated and able to counter the Christian claims above using other verses or passages from the Bible taken out of context. Some can even use the original Greek or Hebrew, again out of context, to refute the Christian's claims. Needless to say, this often leaves Christians speechless and shocked, as they hear Muslims use great apparent skill to turn the Bible against them. So how, practically, is the Christian to prepare for and conduct himself when sharing the gospel and defending the faith with a Muslim?

1. **Speak out of Dependent Prayer and Unconditional Love.** Acknowledge that the real issue is not academic or doctrinal; it is spiritual blindness and demonic warfare. Therefore, the Christian's best efforts are worthless without dependence on prayer and an attitude of love and respect. Pray before, during, and after the encounter for God to speak through you in love and for His Spirit to set this Muslim free from spiritual bondage. Remember that Satan has blinded this Muslim who is in bondage to a religious system that controls every aspect of his life, his family, his political nation, and his future. Converting to Christianity could cost him his job, his family, or even his life. Remember this when the encounter gets heated. The unconditional love Christ has given you to show him is your most powerful apologetic weapon, outside prayer, to win him over. Speak in love and respect, and be patient. Muslims must, on average, hear the gospel twelve times before converting to Christianity.
2. **Avoid the Negative.** Attacking Muhammad, the Qu'ran, Islamic history, or the politics of Muslim countries usually does more harm than good in an apologetic encounter. While it's true that there is substantial historical and contemporary evidence that undermines the morality and reliability of Islam, its founder, and its followers, presenting this evidence in an apologetic encounter usually turns a Muslim from an inquisitive acquaintance to a hostile, closed critic. So keep your discussion focused on the doctrinal issues above.
3. **Make it Personal.** Highlight the relational aspect of your faith. The Muslim believes in a God whom no man can know or relate to, who shows love only to some at his own choosing, and who will judge based on an unknown standard of righteousness. You, however, have your own personal story or testimony of how God has directly revealed Himself in your life and how He daily demonstrates His personal love and provision to you. You know that you are justified in God's sight regardless of future actions and can have perfect peace right now in your relationship with your perfectly loving heavenly father (remember to stress that "father" carries no biological connotations). This relationship will take the Muslim by surprise and may be more effective than the biblical arguments above, for no one can argue against a personal testimony.
4. **Get Ready Now.** Hopefully this paper has awakened within you a conviction that many Muslims in America are better prepared than most Christians to defend their faith. The most important materials you can study are the word of God and the doctrinal truths it teaches. Prepare now to defend the fundamental tenants of the Christian faith with numerous verses taken in proper context. As time allows, study the resources cited below to learn other apologetic arguments that both defend Christianity and expose flaws in Islam.

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