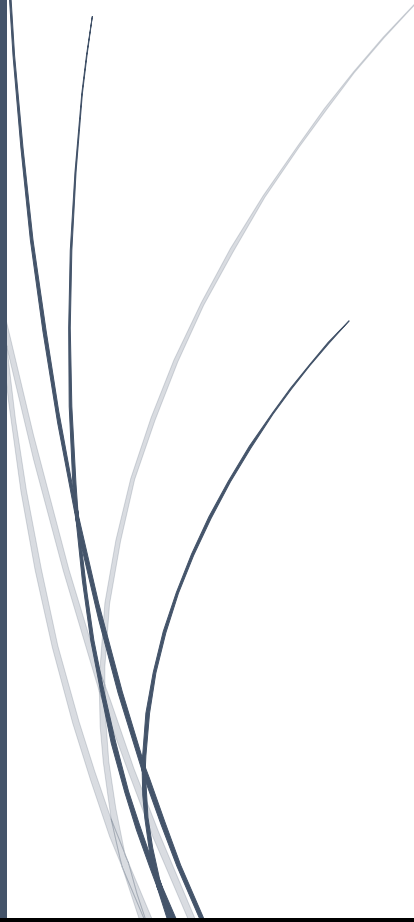


Unraveling Islam



Articles by Robert Sievers
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1. The Hijra and the Cross

Posted on [June 28, 2012](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

How many times have I heard someone state that Christians and Muslims worship the same God? Christians and Muslims both pray, both fast, both have a holy book, and both are commanded to obey their respective moral codes. Yet the more I learned about Islam, the more it seemed evident that key differences of a severe nature existed. Those differences are neither just details of observance nor minor issues of practice. Rather, those differences are profound and yet subtle enough that they require a bit of investigation to bring them out. Moreover, those differences when viewed in succession reveal a sinister pattern that becomes clear to the thoughtful reader. But back to the main point, as Ravi Zacharias said “I often hear the question posed wrongly, ‘Aren’t all religions fundamentally the same and superficially different?’ No. They are fundamentally different and at best they are superficially similar.”

Fundamentally different is a grand statement. To test such a hypothesis, let’s look closely at the pivotal event of each religion and contrast them. Let’s identify the defining moment of each religion and then put them side by side. How would these two events oppose or parallel each another?

The foundational event in Christianity is the crucifixion (and subsequent resurrection) of Jesus Christ. Everything in the gospels leads up to the cross. Each gospel gives an especially inordinate amount of space to Jesus’ last few days on earth. The cross is pivotal; for it is by the atoning death of Jesus that our sins can be forgiven. It is His subsequent resurrection that proves Jesus was who He claimed to be, and that He has the authority to forgive sins. The crucifixion is the pinnacle of Jesus’ work, for by it finally He could say, “It is accomplished.” From the standpoint of the earliest apostles, it was of prime importance ([1 Corinthians 15:3-4](#)). Indeed, the cross is emblematic of Christianity more than anything else. No other event in Jesus’ life approaches the significance of what He achieved on the cross.

What is the pivotal moment in Islam? Was it perhaps the birth or death of Muhammad? Was it the day he first claimed to have received revelations from an angel who identified himself as Gabriel? As it turns out, the critical moment in Islam is the hijra, or migration. Muhammad originally lived in Mecca and suffered various forms of persecution. He became aware of a plot to assassinate him. Muhammad slipped away that very night and with a small band of followers fled the city of Mecca

for Medina. After arriving at Medina, Islam as a faith began to grow, Muhammad gathered many more followers, and years later, triumphantly returned to Mecca with an army. The hijra was the turning point in Islam, and this is uniformly acknowledged by Muslim scholars. For example, Ibrahim B. Syed, Ph. D. says, “There is no doubt whatsoever that the migration of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to Madinah was the crucial event, which established the Islamic civilization.”^[i] Shamim A Siddiqi makes the case that the hijra “is a corner stone or the turning point of the process of the Islamic Movement for the establishment of Allah’s Deen”, and he quotes Mohammad Hussain Haikal as saying, “Caliph Umar took Hijrah as the greatest event of the Islamic history when Rasulullah [the prophet of Allah] migrated from Makkah to Madinah.”^[ii] So critical is the hijra that the Islamic calendar starts there. From an Islamic point of view, this article is written in the year 1433 A.H (anno hijra). Starting a calendar by this event certainly testifies to its place of prestige in the Islamic mindset.

So what happens when the cross and the hijra are considered simultaneously? The cross is all about Jesus embracing persecution. The hijra was about Muhammad fleeing from it. Jesus’ disciples learned of His impending death ([Matthew 16:21](#)), they wanted Jesus to glorify Himself without the cross ([Matthew 16:22](#)), but Jesus would have nothing of it ([Matthew 16:23](#)). He was willing to accept the Father’s plan, regardless of the cost ([Luke 22:42](#)). In contrast, Muhammad, when confronted with paying the ultimate price, planned his getaway. He hatched a plot to have one of his followers take his place at his house to divert attention while he made his escape. ^[iii] His response could not have been any more dissimilar to that of Jesus.

Some people may argue that there were times when Jesus avoided being captured by the crowds, and indeed this is so ([Luke 4:29-30](#)). So too there were times when Muhammad, with an army behind him, was courageous in the face of battle. However, such objections miss the entire point. Regardless of any of these specific times or places, what is being discussed is the central moment, the pivotal event, upon which each religion hinges. For Christianity, it is Jesus accepting the persecution which awaited Him. In Islam, it is Muhammad running from it. Upon inspection, we find the religions are not just different, but that they are totally opposite. The defining moments in each religion are a complete antithesis of each other. What Muhammad did at the critical juncture of Islam is the exact reversal of what Jesus did at the pinnacle of His time as God on earth.

[i] http://www.irfi.org/articles/articles_451_500/significance_of_the_hijrah.htm)

[ii] <http://www.dawahinamericas.com/hijra.htm>

[iii] <http://www.al-islam.org/restatement/18.htm>

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=64>



2. It's a Miracle

Posted on [July 6, 2012](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

Another way to see the distinct difference between Islam and Christianity is to view miracles. How are miracles treated within each religion, and more importantly, what is their purpose?

Within Islam, there are not miracles in the same way that Christians think of miracles as retold in the Bible. In Islam, the Qur'an itself is the miracle. In fact, when people asked Muhammad for a miracle, he told them to read the Qur'an (Qur'an 29-50-51; 17:88-94). Again, to restate this to be clear, from the Muslim perspective, the Qur'an is the miracle. In fact, the Arabic word for "sign" is "ayat," the same word that refers to a verse of the Qur'an. These words are the same because from a Muslim point of view, each ayat of the Qur'an is a sign from Allah. As Ahmed Deedat, a well-known recent Muslim apologist said:

"Again and again when miracles are demanded from the prophet of God by the cynical and frivolous few, he is made to point to the qur`an – message from high – as 'the miracle.' The miracle of miracles! And men of wisdom, people with literary and spiritual insight, who were honest enough to themselves, recognised and accepted al-qur`an as a genuine miracle." [\[i\]](#)

To better understand the Muslim mindset, imagine that instead of using the word "verse," we referred to each passage of the Bible as miraculous. Each time a preacher took to a podium to begin reading a chapter, he would tell us to turn to book such-and-such, chapter so-and so, miracle number 1. Therefore, in order to examine Muhammad's "miracle" of bringing the Qur'an, we must view the Qur'an itself. Since the Qur'an itself is the miracle, we are forced to examine some of its passages to see

what kind of miracle Muhammad was given. We will do so, at the same time comparing these to the miracles of Christ. As always, while doing so, we will be alert to what kind of doctrinal reversals or inversions we may encounter.

Looking back to Christ, consider the miracles He performed. He gave sight to a blind man (John 9), raised a man from the dead (John 11), healed a paralytic (Mark 2), and fed thousands of people with a couple pieces of fish and bread (Matthew 14). Now let's look at Muhammad's miracle, delivering the Qur'an. Close inspection reveals a very different type of miracle when turning the pages of the Qur'an. Muhammad's miracle states that Muslims should ask for permission before leaving Muhammad at a big event (Qur'an 24:62). Muhammad's wives would receive double punishment for indecency (Qur'an 33:30). Muhammad was able to take more wives than other Muslims (Qur'an 33:50). Muhammad was allowed to marry his adopted son's wife (Qur'an 33:37). Visitors to Muhammad's house were explicitly told to leave right after dinner so as not to be an annoyance (Qur'an 33:53). Private criticism of Muhammad is forbidden. (Qur'an 58:9). Finally, people speaking to Muhammad should do so in a soft voice (Qur'an 49:2).

A distinct pattern becomes evident. All of the miracles of Jesus were to help other people. Never once did He perform a miracle that aided his own earthly status as a human. He never once made food to feed himself, used miracles to amuse Himself, or gave Himself special permission for something by supernatural means. Indeed, such use of miracles for Jesus' own comfort and benefit were proffered by Satan in the wilderness and therefore temptations to sin ([Matthew 4:1-11](#)). Even in the case where Jesus had Peter catch two fish to pay the two drachma tax, Jesus emphasizes that this isn't for His own benefit, but rather to keep others from being offended ([Matthew 17:27](#)).

On the other hand, in the case of Muhammad, many of his miraculous Qur'anic recitations were rather convenient to his earthly existence. Even one of Muhammad's wives noted this:

Narrated Hisham's father:

Khaula bint Hakim was one of those ladies who presented themselves to the Prophet for marriage. 'Aisha said, "Doesn't a lady feel ashamed for presenting herself to a man?" But when the Verse: "(O Muhammad) You may postpone (the turn of) any of them (your wives) that you please," (33.51) was revealed, " 'Aisha said, 'O Allah's Apostle! I do not see, but, that your Lord hurries in pleasing you.'" [\[ii\]](#)

One thousand four hundred years later, it's hard to know how much sarcasm Muhammad's wife voiced in the above passage. What isn't difficult to see is that Aisha recognized the quickness in which Muhammad's life was made more convenient and enjoyable at the revelation of this particular verse of the Qur'an. The miracle of the Qur'an made Muhammad's earthly life more pleasant, whereas the miracles of Jesus made other people's lives better. Indeed, we find the two historical figures in diametric opposition to each other. Jesus performed miracles to the benefit of others and never for Himself. In fact, oftentimes Jesus' miracles were done at a cost to Himself. Ultimately, the miracle of Jesus' resurrection was done at the cost of a torturous death. Alternately, Muhammad's miracle of the Qur'an made his own life more comfortable.

Why is there this discrepancy? What does this say about these two miracle workers? Is one type of miracle more deserving of our respect than the other, and if so, why? This can be a great segue into the sacrificial work of Jesus. These are questions where the contrast between Jesus and Muhammad can be discussed delicately to show their vast differences.

[i] Quote from Achmed Deedat, reprinted on <http://www.jannah.org/articles/qurdeed.html>, Accessed April 26, 2009

[ii] Sahih Bukhari: Volume 7, Book 62, Number 48

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=74>

3. Who Do You Make Yourself Out To Be?

Posted on July 15, 2012 by Robert Sievers

One of the aspects I find fascinating in discussions with Muslims is how the very same line of logic is extolled with reference to Islam, and demeaned with reference to Christianity. In an odd twist, Muslims will completely undermine their own logic used to condemn Christianity in order to prove a point praising Islam.

As an example, consider the Muslim line of argument that Jesus could not have been God in the flesh because He never explicitly claimed to be so. Since Jesus never said

the exact words “I am God,” Muslims use this as one of the reasons to believe that Jesus is not God the Son. Typically, you will see this line of argument as one of many in the attempt to deny the deity of Christ. However, I picked one example that is slightly more isolated for the sake of convenience.

“The question: ‘Is Jesus (pbuh) God?’ can be answered by asking a counter question: Did Jesus ever confess to be god? Did he ever say ‘I am God’ or ‘worship me’? And if we read the Bible, we will see that Jesus while he walked this earth, never made such claims.” [\[i\]](#)

Never mind passages such as [John 10:33](#). One typical Christian response is to spend time quoting Biblical passages where Jesus does in fact assert His deity in a variety of ways. [\[ii\]](#) Another excellent avenue of answering this question is to deal with the concept of three different ways in which such a direct statement by Jesus would misrepresent the Trinity, and the ensuing possible heresies that would develop. [\[iii\]](#) Yet as accurate as these rebuttals are, as frequent readers of this blog know, I will be taking a much different tack. In the simple and most basic logical dissection, the Muslim argument is that any man of God would clearly state who he is. Let’s just take this argument at face value, and see where it goes.

In Islam, there is a Messiah-like figure who is coming upon the scene as the hero and deliverer of Islam. This awaited figure is called Al-Mahdi, which in Arabic means “the rightly guided one.” Some Muslims believe this individual is the twelfth imam, who is currently in occultation, waiting to come out of hiding during the last hour. According to Islamic tradition, Al-Mahdi is “an eschatological personage yet to come.” [\[iv\]](#) Islam teaches that in the future, Al-Mahdi will be credited with performing many noble deeds. Two of these are to “restore the faith, and defeat the enemies of Islam.” [\[v\]](#)

This futuristic figure from Islamic tradition is someone whom Muslims believe will have a great deal of impact for Islam as a religion and for Muslims individually. Given his importance within Islam, there are many Hadith describing Al-Mahdi, and many books written to help Muslims recognize him when he comes onto the scene. While studying the individual traits of Al-Mahdi is a fascinating study itself, and one that will be undertaken later in this blog, for now it is more important to focus on what Al-Mahdi will say about himself.

Rather than listening to this blogger's pontification, read what Muslims themselves say about him. "When they say, 'You are the Mahdi' **he will deny it...**" and "They will say to him, 'this is your name and this is your father's name, all the signs are upon you,' but **he will not admit it...**" (emphasis mine) [vi]

Yes, one of the ways in which Muslims will be able to recognize Al-Mahdi is that Al-Mahdi will never actually specifically admit to being Al-Mahdi. He will never say "I am Al-Mahdi." In a twist of irony so thick it's hard to believe, the proof Muslims use to deny Jesus as the Son of God is the very same one they will use to confirm and herald the awaited defender of their faith, Al-Mahdi.

Is a man of God required to make explicit statements about his identity? It's a simple question really. If the answer is yes, then Muslims are acknowledging that their own apocalyptic views of their own religion are flawed beyond repair. If the answer is no, then their own argument against Jesus to disprove his divinity must be abandoned. Muslims are welcome to choose whichever answer they want, as long as it is consistently applied in both Jesus and Al-Mahdi.

Unraveling this particular tenet of Muslim apologetics is fascinating, but I must offer an admonition. Using such arguments with Muslims can often result in hard feelings and extract visceral reactions. The gospel is always conveyed through prayer, friendship, and subsequent sharing of the Good News of Christ. This information is provided as a means of educating and equipping Christians to have profitable encounters with Muslims, not arguments to be used in isolation. I would welcome comments from those who have friendships with Muslims strong enough to bear such a perilous conversation.

[i] <https://shajahanahmed.wordpress.com/2010/01/10/%E2%80%99i-am-he%E2%80%99-does-that-really-make-jesus-pbuh-god/>

[ii] http://www.radicaltruth.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=98:where-does-jesus-say-i-am-god&catid=11:radical-truth-christianity&Itemid=9

[iii] http://www.muhammadanism.org/Jesus/Jesus_did_not_claim.htm

[iv] Zwemer, Samuel. Heirs of the Prophets. Chicago, IL: Moody Bible Institute, 1946, p115.

[v] Esposito, John L. The Oxford Dictionary of Islam. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003, p185.

[vi][http://harunyahya.com/en/Ahir_Zamana_ait_Yeni_Bilgiler/13256/Hazrat Mahdi \(as\) will accept no claims regarding his being the Mahdi](http://harunyahya.com/en/Ahir_Zamana_ait_Yeni_Bilgiler/13256/Hazrat_Mahdi_(as)_will_accept_no_claims_regarding_his_being_the_Mahdi)

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=80>



4. Salaam Alaikum

Posted on [July 26, 2012](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

If you have ever been to a mosque, or even just been hanging out with a group of Muslim friends, as-salaam alaikum is an expression that will be heard time and time again. As-salaam alaikum is the standard greeting Muslims share with each other when meeting. This expression is Arabic for “Peace be upon you.” The common response back is a similar return greeting of peace, Wa alaikum assalaam (and upon you be peace). Even in this innocuous and harmless method of saying hello we find an interesting spiritual inversion. Sharing the peace might seem a place where Christianity and Islam look similar at first glance, but what might we find upon further investigation?

With a cursory look, a person would note that Jesus brought peace ([John 16:33](#)). Paul talks about the peace that passes all understanding ([Philippians 4:7](#)). So too a Muslim will tell you plainly that the word Islam, which means submission, comes from the same Arabic root word as peace, salam. It’s right about here where any conversation will get sidetracked with whether or not Islam is truly a religion of peace. While those conversations have value, for the purposes of this blog, this author will not go down such a detour. By keeping on topic, a much more subtle yet profound truth will come to light. So here we stand, both Christians and Muslims claiming that each religion is one of peace. Muslims are even quick to cite such passages as [John 20:21](#) as evidence that Jesus was a Muslim, since he gave the traditional Islamic greeting of peace. [\[i\]](#)

To unravel this confusion, let's look at greetings in the Bible in more depth. Paul has the greatest number of epistles, so there are myriad examples of greetings there. To get a flavor for these, examine [1 Corinthians 1:3](#), [Romans 1:7](#), or [Galatians 1:3](#). What pattern emerges? Or consider the greetings of Peter in [1 Peter 1:2](#) or [2 Peter 1:2](#), or again those of John in [2 John 3](#) or [Revelation 1:4](#). Seventeen times in the Bible there are greetings of both grace and peace. However, in each circumstance, notice that the order is always the same. In each case, the grace comes before the peace. Not even once does peace come first before grace.

This raises the question of whether it is possible for peace to ever come before there is grace. In the book of Philippians, the context of the passage discussing the peace that passes all comprehension is that such peace comes after rejoicing, prayer, and offering thanks to God. We are only able to do these because of God's grace to bring us to Himself in the first place. In [John 16:33](#), the context is that peace will be given because Jesus has overcome the world, and He has just told His disciples plainly who He is, and therefore how He has the right to grant this peace. He grants it by the fact that He will return to the Father in order to be the instrument of grace to those who believe.

So again the question must be asked if there can even be peace without grace. There is surely no peace between God and any individual human until a person accepts the reconciliation that God offers via Jesus Christ. That peace between God and man comes only by grace alone and not by merit ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)). For our relationship with God, peace comes as a result of God's grace. Peace between individuals, groups, or nations can be achieved temporarily and to a limited extent. However, history shows us clearly that strife between nations has been a permanent fixture of our world. Personal experience shows us that maintaining peace with family members and friends is a constant battle. Indeed, maintaining that peace often requires showing the grace of forgiveness to those who have harmed us. Here too, oftentimes peace comes as a natural consequence of extending grace to those we encounter.

Yet what about the claims by Muslims that Jesus offered the traditional Muslim greeting of peace? Indeed, the Bible records four times when Jesus offers this greeting; [Luke 24:36](#), [John 20:19](#), [John 20:21](#), and [John 20:26](#). What commonality do all these verses share? In each case, this greeting comes after the resurrection! Jesus only gives this greeting after He has died on the cross and returned to the Father, healing the fractured relationship between God and man. The greeting of

“peace” only occurs after Jesus has accomplished His mission of allowing us to receive God’s grace to its fullest measure. Once again, peace follows grace.

In this simple example, we again see a marked difference between Islam and Christianity. In Islam, peace is put first and foremost and yet is attempted without grace. In Christianity, peace comes only after grace, never before.

Perhaps as Christians we should say hello by saying “grace be unto you.” To be more serious, I would ask any native Arabic speakers to comment with the anglicized equivalent of “grace be unto you” in Arabic. What would a Muslim say if greeted this way?

[i] <http://my.opera.com/islamicworld/blog/?id=28141622>

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=91>



5. The Gospel of Ali ibn Abi Talib

Posted on August 8, 2012 by Robert Sievers

In this blog’s [inaugural article](#), I discussed the antithetical nature of the hijra and the cross. There are many such cases where doctrines and beliefs of Islam and Christianity are total opposites. While many of the articles forthcoming will highlight more of these, there is another aspect of Islam that deserves written space. It is the way in which Islam tends to undermine its own doctrinal stances, and winds up preaching the gospel in a roundabout and ironic fashion. To see what I am referring to, let’s consider the hijra in more detail.

The hijra, or migration, is the pivotal event in the history of Islam. This is true to such an extent that the Islamic calendar is dated and based to this crucial day. The hijra begins the Islamic calendar, and so today’s date would be in the year 1433, A.H., or anno hijra. But let’s return to ground zero, 0 A.H, and look more closely at this most crucial time within Islam and see what irony lies deep within this most foundational historical narrative in Islam.

Muhammad had undergone various forms of persecution from the citizens of Mecca. On this particular day, the tension had come to a head and a meeting was held to decide what to do with this new group, the Muslims. The consensus deemed the best way to thwart this new movement was to take the ultimate sanction against Muhammad, and so the leaders of Mecca forged a plan to murder him. The plan was to surround his house that night with several men from each tribe, and ambush him that next morning when he came out. Muhammad had learned of this plan through a secret convert, and so devised his own counterplot to escape. His cousin, Ali ibn Abi Talib, would wear Muhammad's cloak and sleep in Muhammad's bed that night, giving Muhammad the opportunity to flee without arousing suspicion. Sure enough, the would-be assassins peeked in, saw someone he thought was Muhammad sleeping, and contentedly waited for morning. In their relaxed state, Muhammad was able to sneak out past his enemies that night. When dawn came, all that the would-be killers found was Muhammad's cousin. From there, the story continues regarding how Muhammad was able to make his way to Medina, but it is the efforts of Ali ibn Abi Talib which warrant our attention.

Ali's willingness to put himself directly in harm's way was certainly a brave act, and one that is praised within Islam. Ali might have been killed by accident since the perpetrators could have thought that he was Muhammad. Alternatively, when they recognized he wasn't Muhammad but Ali, they might have killed him anyway out of frustration. In either case, such a courageous act is certainly one to be admired. While debated by Islamic scholars, some believe that the following verse of the Qur'an itself praises Ali's specific act of selfless substitutionary act.

[2.207] And among men is he who sells himself to seek the pleasure of Allah; and Allah is Affectionate to the servants.

Muslims are reticent to ever discuss the gospel per se, but in a twist of irony, they are always willing to discuss the gospel when it occurs within Islam. What am I talking about? Consider the words of our Lord Jesus Christ from [John 15:13](#). "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." Here in the act of Ali we find the gospel buried deep within Islamic historical narrative. While Muhammad was busy mounting his escape, Ali actually shows the correct path of laying down your life for the cause. Of course it was the wrong cause, but conceptually, Ali showed the power of being willing to die in the place of someone else. As a Muslim talks about the worthiness of Ali's actions, he inadvertently is admitting the power and greatness of substitutionary sacrifice as a model of righteousness, before the next

breath when he demeans the “shameful” idea of Jesus offering his life as a substitutionary sacrifice! Everyone knows what it means to pay the ultimate price of your life for the good of others. Muslims will deny it with reference to Jesus, but will proudly acknowledge it when discussing Islamic history.

Of course, all this praise of Ali pales in comparison to Jesus, who not only allowed Himself to be betrayed to the Jewish leaders, who turned Him over to the Romans, but actually did pay that ultimate price for us. There was no escape from the cross for Him. The path to glory is always via the cross. It cannot be circumvented.

As a final note, I am unclear how to effectively use such an example in a ministry context. How exactly does a person have a good conversation with a Muslim about the worthiness of what Jesus did on the cross by using Ali’s example as a crowbar to pry open the door of recognition of substitutionary sacrifice as the ultimate act of love? I would be interested to hear from others regarding their experiences with such dialog.

Source: <http://www.al-islam.org/restatement/18.htm>

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=100>



6. Opportunity Lost

Posted on [August 17, 2012](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

Earlier this year, I attended an interfaith dialog between Peter Kreeft, Professor of Philosophy, Boston College and Zeki Saritoprak, Director of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi Chair in Islamic Studies, John Carroll University. Every time I attend one of these forums, I return disappointed and discouraged. Typically the Muslim speaker does a wonderful job of explaining Islam to an audience that has no context or background to test whether or not what they are being told is accurate. The Christian speaker then dances around the gospel in an attempt not to offend anyone in the audience.

“This one will be different”, I told myself. As a prolific author of 55 books, including such titles as *The Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, *Faith and Reason*, and *Back*

to *Virtue*, surely Kreeft would handle the tough issues delicately but unwaveringly. My hopes were vastly misplaced.

Both scholars were given ten minutes to summarize their respective religions. Saritoprak gave a capable and ordered overview of the five pillars of Islam and its six articles of faith. Kreeft began first by stating that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. He did then speak of the incarnation briefly, but then went adrift by spending the rest of his short time discussing areas of commonality between Islam and Christianity.

This blog will delve deeply into the issue of whether Christians and Muslims worship the same God in later articles. Whatever your personal view, at the very minimum it cannot be denied that Kreeft made a huge assumption. Moreover, starting your speech summarizing Christianity by introducing such a controversial point seems rather odd to me. Is this really a profitable way to begin discussing the Christian faith, by equating Allah and YHWH?

What was even more distressing to me was that in this introduction, and indeed throughout the entire 1 hour and 40 minute dialogue, not once did Dr. Kreeft mention either the cross or the resurrection! How does a Christian apologist have a dialogue with a Muslim and never once mention the cornerstone of Christian doctrine? What power does Jesus have without His crucifixion and subsequent triumph over death?

During the discussion Kreeft also commented that the Qur'an contains a great deal of truth, and therefore cannot have come from sinister sources. The Qur'an does contain some accounts that are similar to the Bible, such as the account of the parting of the Red Sea, or Jesus' virgin birth. I don't follow the logic though that since the Qur'an has elements of truth, it cannot be demonically inspired. Any skilled liar knows that the best lies are those encapsulated by truths. If I tell you that I flew to the moon yesterday, you can discard my statement as ridiculous immediately. If I suppress a lie inside a number of truths, it will be harder for you to spot. A meal of pure arsenic is much less effective as a poison than a beautiful and tasty dinner sprinkled with just enough arsenic to be deadly. An enemy that masquerades as an angel of light is much more effective than an enemy that makes his deadly presence blatantly known. ([2 Corinthians 11:14](#))

I am not advocating debate for the sake of trying to score points. I am not suggesting we engage in name calling, nor being purposely offensive. Neither am I a proponent of yelling, belittling, or ridiculing those who disagree. What I am suggesting is that when in interfaith dialogue, we not back down from the great truths Jesus gave to us. His message is an outrageous one, and Jesus Himself said it will be divisive.

([Matthew 10:34-36](#)) The cross is a stumbling block, foolishness to some and offensive to others ([1 Corinthians 1:23](#)). Christianity is not about watering down eternal truths. It is about God coming to earth as a human, living a sinless life, dying as an atonement for our sins, and being raised from the dead as a witness to the veracity of His claims. How does ignoring these truths in order to have a more friendly discussion serve anyone?

Someone of Kreeft's stature has the responsibility to do better ([Luke 12:48](#)). I would have preferred to share this with Dr. Kreeft privately and personally before publishing this critique, but due to his popularity, he understandably is not able to accept personal emails. I would hope that Christians in interfaith dialogue would not engage in unfruitful or combative debate, but would have profitable discussions. Yet such dialogue should not begin by assuming Christians and Muslims worship the same God. It should include the pinnacle of Jesus' efforts here on earth, the cross and resurrection. It should cater to the possibility that the Qur'an may have diabolical origins. It must stand firm in proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ, even though the gospel may be a stumbling block and an offense.

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=105>



7. Created in the Image of God

Posted on [August 26, 2012](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

Often times, the articles in this blog compare theological differences between Christianity and Islam that display an amazing degree of irony. Sometimes the differences are more straightforward. Still, such routine differences are no less useful to discuss. One such difference is just what it means for humans to be created in the image of God.

In [Genesis 1:26](#), God relates that He creates man in His image. There is a fair amount of discussion among Christian scholars about what this means. Obviously we humans cannot be compared directly to God in that we exist as matter, whereas God is spirit ([John 4:24](#)). Yet there is something about the way God created us as humans that is special and is in His likeness ([Psalm 8:5](#); [Psalm 139:14](#)).

Just how are we created in God's image, and what does this have to do with the Allah of Islam? In the first place, we are created as eternal beings. We are not eternal in the complete sense, since we each have a beginning date of creation. However, we will live forever, either with God in heaven or without Him in hell. This is a choice we must each make, and this brings us to another way in which we are like God. We all have free will. As volitional agents, we can each affect the world around us by means of the choices we make. In still another sense, we are like God in that we have a triune makeup. We each have a mind, a body, and a spirit. Somehow, these three operate as one ([1 Thessalonians 5:23](#)). Of course, this is nowhere near an exact analogy to the trinity, but how my spirit, my mind and my body interact is a question too wonderful for me to fully grasp.

Throughout the Bible, we find that God has a great deal of regard for His created humans ([Psalm 8:4](#), [2 Peter 3:9](#)). He even gives us the free will to reject Him! When you think of it, that is quite an amazing fact. God loves us so much that He gives us the power to assert our independence to such a degree that we can choose to refuse His free gift of eternal life. Of course, doing so results in the most dire of all consequences, an eternity separated from Him.

So how does Allah see humanity? On the surface, it seems Islam and Christianity are similar, in that Muslims also believe Allah created Adam in his form and shape.^[i] Yet deeper investigation reveals something more as the Qur'an relates a story of how Allah treated some disbelievers in an unnamed town at an unspecified time.

[2.65] And certainly you have known those among you who exceeded the limits of the Sabbath, so We said to them: Be (as) apes, despised and hated.

And

[5.60] Say: Shall I inform you of (him who is) worse than this in retribution from Allah? (Worse is he) whom Allah has cursed and brought His wrath upon, and of

whom He made apes and swine, and he who served the Shaitan; these are worse in place and more erring from the straight path.

Tafsir, commentaries on the Qur'an, make it clear that this metamorphosis was not allegorical, but literal.^[ii] In fact, Maulana Mufti Muhammads Hafi', in his tafsir Ma'arif-ul-Qur'an, adds an extended footnote stating that any non-literal interpretation is a deviant view of modernizing Muslims. He has this to say about Muslims who claim the passage is not literal: "To say such a thing is to deny an explicit statement of the Holy Qur'an, which no Muslim can do..."^[iii]

According to Islam, Allah has in the past destroyed the very humanity of his created creatures. This is something YHWH would never do. True, God gives us the right to reject Him, but God gives us this ability as an act which in a sense upholds our dignity of free will as human beings. In Islam, one of the punishments given to some of his creatures before going to hell is to be turned into an unreasoning animal. Would God, who grieves when we reject Him, ever punish us by turning us into an animal and thereby taking away our very ability to accept Him before our death? That's not the God I know.

The God that I know only disciplines us for our own good ([Hebrews 12:10](#), [1 Corinthians 11:32](#)). It is true that sin has consequences, and often times bad things happen because we bring it upon ourselves (1 King 8:32). Yet this ties back into the whole issue of free will. Our own choices can boomerang on us to our own destruction. Yet in all this, God never curses us and then maims or mutilates that which He created in His own image by turning us into primates or other mammals. Allah does.

This is just another difference between YHWH of the Bible and Allah of the Qur'an.

[i] Sahih Bukhari, Volume 8, Book 74, Number 246. http://www.sahih-bukhari.com/Pages/Bukhari_8_74.php

[ii] Ibn Kathir, downloaded from <http://www.quran4u.com/Tafsir%20Ibn%20Kathir/PDF/002%20Baqarah%20I.pdf>, p 199-200.

[iii] <http://islamkashmir.org/radiant-reality/2007/01/lesson-quran>

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=113>



8. Prophetic Names

Posted on September 6, 2012 by Robert Sievers

What's in a name? My name is Robert, which supposedly means "famous." I know for a fact my parents didn't think much about the meaning behind my name, but chose it for other reasons. However, in the culture of Biblical times, the meaning of names carried much more weight. What types of differences emerge between Christianity and Islam when we examine prophetic names and their underlying meanings?

First, to see the importance of the meanings behind names in ancient near eastern cultures, consider the twelve sons of Jacob. A fascinating study is to look at each of those names and how they spotlight the competition between Leah and Rachel ([Gen 29:32](#)). Every time Leah called her son Reuben, she literally said, "See, a son." Clearly part of this name was a jab at Rachel, but that is an entirely different avenue of study. The meanings behind names in general carried weight, but what can be said about prophets? Do their names tend to signify anything special?

Consider Moses. Moses means "saved from the water" [\[i\]](#) or more figuratively "drawn out." Moses got this name due to the nature of how he was delivered as a baby from Pharaoh's decree to have all Hebrew males killed ([Exodus 2:10](#)). As with many other parts of the Bible, this particular event had a double fulfillment. Not only did Moses get his name based on his manner of deliverance from being killed as a child, but later in life, his name represented him on another level. Moses was the leader responsible for "drawing out" his people from the land of Egypt. In the dramatic events of the parting of the Red Sea, the Hebrews were "saved from the water."

Later, as prophets of God arose, their names all seem to follow a pattern. Isaiah means "the Lord is generous" or "Salvation of the Lord." Samuel means "asked of God" or "heard by God." Daniel means "The Lord judges." Micah means "who is like God?" I am sure someone has created a Bible study based on the names of the prophets, and what they say about God. Being removed from the Hebrew, English

speakers tend to miss the deeper meanings that pervade the Old Testament in general, and names are a prime example of that.

When we come to the New Testament, this trend continues. Jesus was given His name for a special reason as well. Jesus means “God saves” ([Matthew 1:21](#)). What a powerful connection between what Jesus did and His name, because that was His ultimate purpose, to save His people from their sin. Names have meaning, and those meanings shed light on what God is doing.

As always, it is time to turn to Islam to see how it compares to Christianity. While Muhammad did not come on the scene until six centuries after Jesus, it can be asked “What does the name Muhammad signify?” Muhammad means “the praised one.” Is “the praised one” really an accurate description of his name’s meaning? To find out, let’s listen to Muhammad’s own words, as reported by Jabir ibn ‘Abdullah al-Ansari,

He made my name ‘Muhammad,’ for I am praised by everyone on the Day of Judgment when decrees will be issued, and none besides me will receive such praise. [\[ii\]](#)

According to Muhammad, nobody else besides him (excepting Allah I would assume) will receive the kind of praise that he will. Muhammad states that he will be of all prophets most praised.

At this point, frequent readers of the blog will know exactly where this article is going. Names of prophets always share a common theme; they all point back toward God. In some way or another, each of the names tells us something about God, or praises God in some way for who He is. Jesus’ name gives us another verification of just who He is as well. However, when we look to Islam, we find the prophet of Islam has a name which flips the praise the other direction. Instead of the praise going toward God, the praise is directed at Muhammad. The compass points 180 degrees away from the true north of God, and the prophet becomes the praised one.

Of course Muslims may say that only Allah is worthy of highest praise. As Christians, we would whole-heartedly agree that God is worthy of this highest praise. But such an agreement misses the mark about how we each view the respective prophets of our religions. As Christians, the prophets’ names themselves just point back toward God by what their names convey. In Islam, Muhammad’s name signifies that it is he

who receives praise. What does it mean to be called a prophet and have a name that honors yourself rather than God?

Do names have meaning? Do the corresponding names of those who are considered prophets tell us something about Christianity and Islam?

Yes, they do.

[i] <http://www.meaning-of-names.com/hebrew-names/moses.asp>

[ii] <http://www.al-islam.org/muhammad-yasin-jibouri/4.htm>

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=122>



9. The Worship of Muhammad – Part One

Posted on [September 16, 2012](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

I have been asked many times in the past few days about my thoughts on the uprisings in Egypt and Libya. In short, the issue is not solely political, but theological as well. Since this blog is not about politics, I will take the road less traveled. What exactly is the Muslim's view of Muhammad that causes such visceral reactions?

Muslims complain that Christians believe in and worship “a man.” Closer examination of how Muslims treat Muhammad offers yet another bizarre twist when comparing Islam and Christianity. While Muslims technically do not worship Muhammad, in many ways their actions tell a much different tale. Everything from the Islamic creed, to how Muslims behave in everyday life, to the Qur'an itself appears a lot like Muhammad worship.

In this first of a four part series on the worship of Muhammad, consider the shahada, the Muslim creed. To become a Muslim, a person must recite the shahada in Arabic. Roughly translated, the shahada is as follows,

“I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and I bear witness that Mohammad is the messenger of Allah”

Notice that this is a two part testimony. Of course Muslims believe that there is no god but Allah, but look at the rest of the shahada. Part two of the Muslim creed is that you must also believe that Muhammad brought the message of Allah.

Consider these words within a Muslim tract discussing the shahada,

“The second part of the Shahada means that Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) is the servant and chosen messenger of Allah. No one must have two opinions about this matter.” [\[1\]](#)

From the Muslim perspective, a person who believes in the concept of God without believing that Muhammad brought “the” message is not a Muslim. In other words, believing in Allah is not enough to be called a Muslim. A Muslim must also believe that Muhammad is Allah’s messenger. So what was that message? One part of it is that Muhammad’s actions are to be followed as closely as possible (Qur’an 33:21). This means, by corollary, Islam requires belief “in a man.” Some readers may think this an overextension of Islamic doctrine. Yet consider what the Qur’an itself has to say on the issue of belief,

[49.15] The believers are only those who believe in Allah and His Apostle then they doubt not and struggle hard with their wealth and their lives in the way of Allah; they are the truthful ones.

Muslims must believe both in Allah as well as Muhammad, his apostle. It is true that the way in which Muslims are to believe in Muhammad is very different than the way a Christian is commanded to believe in Jesus. However, Christians are not required to state a creed that they believe that Isaiah and Haggai are prophets in order to be a Christian. Of course, we do believe they are prophets, but stating it isn’t part of any Christian confession. In contrast, if a Muslim does not believe in Muhammad, he is not a Muslim and cannot go to paradise, thus making the religion of Islam oddly coupled to a man. Not only is the belief in Muhammad as the messenger stressed from the positive standpoint as referenced in the previously cited passage of the Qur’an, but unbelief in Muhammad is stressed from the negative standpoint in many passages as well. Hellfire is guaranteed for those who do not believe in and obey both Allah AND his apostle.

[4.14] And whoever disobeys Allah and His Apostle and goes beyond His limits, He will cause him to enter fire to abide in it, and he shall have an abasing chastisement.

The instructions Muslims receive on how to lead their lives result in worship of Muhammad in every way but name only. To understand this, we must recognize that Islamic doctrine is such that belief in God alone gives Muslims no rules for life. The Qur'an gives some instructions, but in a vacuum it doesn't have nearly enough detail to allow for a workable system to live out faith. A devout Muslim therefore must look to Muhammad, whose life is the only one believed to be of sufficient record to be followed as the premier example. This is becoming obvious even to Muslims, and when a Muslim dares state it, he may be branded heretical. This next quote is from such an accused Muslim, Anna Jordan. Please remember this is not some Christian author discussing perceptions of Muslims; this is a Muslim describing the state of her own religion.

While they have adamantly insisted they do not deify Mohammed, they have sought to supplement God's word by looking for guidance in the words and actions of Mohammed, thereby elevating the prophet to a status never ordained by God. [ii]

For a religion which stresses not believing in "a man," it seems strange that the creed of initiation must include him and that the holy book requires obedience to him. Muslims are inadvertently doing exactly what they loudly proclaim must not be done. In the next part of this series, the Qur'an will be examined in more detail as to how it equates Allah and Muhammad in some rather compromising comparisons.

[i] <http://www.islamworld.net/docs/become.html>

[ii] <http://www.islamunraveled.org/islam-myths/other-religions/james-quran-intro.php>

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=128>



10. The Worship of Muhammad, Part Two

Posted on [September 27, 2012](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

In the previous article, it was noted that the fundamental Islamic creed requires belief in Muhammad. Becoming a Muslim requires an explicit statement to show confidence in Muhammad as a prophet. Additionally, it was shown how the Qur'an mandates obedience not just to Allah, but to Muhammad as well.

In this article, the Qur'an itself will be examined in more detail. As will be shown shortly, the Qur'an undermines its own position by lumping Allah and Muhammad into the same category on a variety of occasions. Muhammad and Allah are mentioned together in some rather awkward occurrences which convey theological meaning. Let's examine a few of these. Those presented here are but a brief snapshot. The Qur'an implies equality between Muhammad and Allah on a number of points, and we must not ignore them. While many of these passages do not necessarily conclude by themselves that Muhammad is deified, the set as a whole paints a very clear picture of the role that Muhammad plays within Islam.

For example, swearing allegiance to Muhammad is the same as doing so to Allah.

Qur'an 048.010

Verily those who plight their fealty to thee do no less than plight their fealty to Allah:

As another example, obedience to Muhammad and to Allah are considered one in the same.

Qur'an 004.080

He who obeys the Messenger, obeys Allah.

In this following verse, notice that a Muslim's love for not just Allah, but Muhammad as well must surpass even that of his or her own family.

Qur'an 009.024

Say: If it be that your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your mates, or your kindred; the wealth that ye have gained; the commerce in which ye fear a decline: or the dwellings in which ye delight – are dearer to you than Allah, or His Messenger, or the striving in His cause;- then wait until Allah brings about His decision: and Allah guides not the rebellious.

To recap, the Qur'an states that a pledge to Muhammad is the equivalent of a pledge to Allah, commands the same level of obedience to Muhammad as to Allah, and requires love for both Muhammad and Allah to surpass that of anything else in your life, including family and spouse. If that isn't worship, what is?

The skeptical reader may object that while these arguments are somewhat damning, today's Muslims don't truly believe Muhammad is a god. It is true no Muslim thinks they treat Muhammad as a god. Yet Muslims unwittingly deify Muhammad with their own words. For example, Dr. Muzammil H. Siddiqi, describes Muhammad this way:

“Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) practiced what he preached. He very carefully and meticulously followed the Qur'an, Allah's Word that was revealed to him. He followed and lived the Qur'an at every moment in every detail of his life. His life was the reflection of Allah's Words. He became the Qur'an in person, the embodiment of the Qur'an, or one may even say in a metaphorical sense ‘the Word in flesh’” [\[i\]](#)

The term “the Word in flesh” should instantly call Scripture to mind. The true Word in flesh is described in [John 1:14](#):

14 And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

The Muslims who criticize Christians for believing Jesus is the Word made flesh believe that Muhammad is the “Word in flesh”. How ironic it is that the Islamic religion, one so depending upon a man, lambastes Christianity for worshipping a man. Of course since Jesus is also God, Christians are not polytheistic, since we worship God only. Yet the tables have been oddly turned, in that Christians are being falsely accused of the very thing Muslims do. Muslims decry polytheism as heresy, and yet simultaneously elevate Muhammad, a mere man, to a status where he receives many of the special privileges otherwise due only to God.

Once again we see that Islam has taken Christianity and flipped it upside down, inside out, and irrevocably twisted it out of recognition. God became man in order to deliver us, and as such, we worship God alone. Yet another inversion has occurred. The same people who mistakenly accuse Christians of worshiping a man are locked

into a system where they do not realize nor admit that they do exactly what they prohibit. The inversions just keep coming.

In Part three and four of this series, the Hadith will be considered. The deification of Muhammad will be seen in its most clear and blatant forms.

[i]

<http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentID=200805025178>

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=137>



11. The Worship of Muhammad – Part Three

Posted on October 4, 2012 by Robert Sievers

The worship of Muhammad comes into focus in some unusual places. Consider the Islamic law regarding the image of Muhammad himself. Islamic law forbids that any representation of Muhammad be drawn, painted, or otherwise shown. Yet where does this prohibition come from? No verse of the Qur'an states that such representations of Muhammad cannot be made. Of course, the Hadith give more detail on what can and cannot be done within Islam. Strangely enough, when the Hadith are examined, no prohibition of drawing or painting an image of Muhammad is there either. Instead we find a general prohibition against any images of human beings whatsoever.

Sahih Muslim, Book 024, Number 5268:

Ibn 'Umar reported Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) having said: Those who paint pictures would be punished on the Day of Resurrection and it would be said to them: Breathe soul into what you have created. [i]

So Islamic law maintains that the prohibition is extended to the representation of any person, not just Muhammad. Yet this Islamic tradition of not allowing images of people seems to get ignored with regard to the average person and amplified in relation to Muhammad, even though he is not singled out in any of the original Islamic texts. Then why do Muslims forbid any such representations of Muhammad? Muslim authors are quick to point out that the reasoning behind not having any images of Muhammad is to prevent later followers from worshipping him. That seems a fair statement, so let's see where it leads and how it plays out in real life.

Many people have discussed this issue in relation to the Danish cartoons of Muhammad and the ensuing controversy, but here let's move right past that to the road less travelled. In 1977, Anthony Quinn starred in a little-known movie called "Muhammad, Messenger of God," or alternatively titled "The Messenger." [\[ii\]](#) Directed by a Syrian born Muslim and approved by the renowned Al-Azhar university, the personage of Muhammad is never shown. It's odd to watch an entire full-length feature film about Muhammad without ever seeing him. The movie shows the actions and movements of his followers and his enemies during the inception of Islam as a religion. Everyone else is represented, but not Muhammad. He is given unique status in that throughout the movie his character is never depicted on camera. In the movie's introduction, the following reason is given,

"The makers of this film honor the Islamic tradition which holds that the impersonation of the prophet offends against the spirituality of his message. Therefore, the person of Muhammad will not be shown."

Here again the irony of Islamic thought comes straight to the forefront. In an attempt to prevent the worship of Muhammad, he gets elevated to a special status no other character is given. He has been raised to a level beyond any other man. Just as God Himself cannot be seen face to face, so too Muhammad receives the same status from the cinematography point of view. What likely started with genuine concerns has had massive unintended consequence. The very attempt to prevent the worship of Muhammad has caused his undisplayed image to become an object of worship. Perhaps this seems a stretch to some

readers, but consider how the Hadith describe Muhammad's physical appearance,

Sahih Muslim, Book 030, Number 5772:

Al-Bara' reported that Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) had the most handsome face amongst men and he had the best disposition and he was neither very tall nor short-statured. [iii]

His likeness is deemed so amazing that it surpassed all other men. Again, while this isn't technically worship in a strict theological sense, it sure comes across as such. Perhaps most striking is a line from the movie itself. As the movie unfolds where Muhammad goes unseen throughout, one of the characters aptly states, "The real god is unseen." This author could not agree more.

Muslims grant Muhammad the same status as God Himself with regards to the representation of His image. In the Muslim attempt to avoid idolatry, they have inadvertently created a new and powerful unseen idol.

In the last installment of this series, more explicit Hadith will be unpacked which are nothing short of shocking.

[i]

http://www.searchtruth.com/book_display.php?book=024&translator=2&start=0&number=5268

[ii] <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0074896/>

[iii]

http://www.searchtruth.com/book_display.php?book=030&translator=2&start=118&number=5770

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=144>



12. The Worship of Muhammad – Part Four

Posted on [October 14, 2012](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

In the past three articles, I have discussed how Muslims unwittingly deify Muhammad. Some readers may be tired of this line of discussion, but it is so important, I felt it necessary to expose how the Hadith discuss Muhammad, and therefore how Muslims are to revere him. The Hadith offer an interesting picture that goes beyond the pale of treating Muhammad as a mere man. The following Hadith makes it more clear how early Muslims viewed Muhammad.

In this first Hadith, consider how a Muslim would feel had he possessed a lock of Muhammad's hair.

Narrated Ibn Sirrn: I said to 'Ablda, "I have some of the hair of the Prophet which I got from Anas or from his family." 'Abida replied. "No doubt if I had a single hair of that it would have been dearer to me than the whole world and whatever is in it."

[\[i\]](#)

Here we see the hair of a dead man's head was considered more valuable than the entire earth and its contents. If this is not worship, what is?

Many Hadith on seemingly unrelated topics contain information about Muhammad and his importance. A well-known Hadith called the "law laaka" deals with Adam's first trespass, and his subsequent request for forgiveness. The Hadith claims that when Adam repented of his sin, he did so for the sake of Muhammad, who of course was not even born yet! [\[ii\]](#) In other words, it was because of Muhammad that Allah chose to forgive Adam. For those readers confused by the anachronism of how Adam could have known about Muhammad, see the source cited.

Perhaps one of the boldest claims comes from the words of a Muslim author from the same cited source discussing this particular Hadith. We find that Muhammad is the entire reason for creation itself!

*"Indeed the Prophet of Allah (sallallahu 'alaihi wasallam) **is the reason** for the creation of Adam 'alaihi salam and the universe. If the Prophet of Allah (sallallahu 'alaihi wasallam) was not in existence, then the 'Arsh and Kursi, Lawh and Qalam, the Skies and the Earth, Heaven and Hell, the trees and stones and all other creatures **would not exist.**" (emphasis mine)*

How can a man be the sole reason causing God to create the universe? Not only is Muhammad deemed the reason for creation itself, but perhaps most astoundingly, even Muhammad himself claimed a unique capability relative to his followers. In another Hadith, Muhammad describes five things given to no other prophet but himself. The 4th one is that “I have been given the right of intercession (on the Day of Resurrection).” [iii] There are other Hadith which claim Muhammad as intercessor for Muslims such as this,

Abu Huraira reported Allah’s Messenger (may peace be upon him) as saying: I shall be pre-eminent amongst the descendants of Adam on the Day of Resurrection and I will be the first intercessor and the first whose intercession will be accepted (by Allah). [iv]

In this Hadith, Muhammad is seen to be above all other humans, and indeed all other prophets, with regard to his status in relation to Allah. Muslims disagree about exactly how much authority this Hadith shows Muhammad to have. However, what is agreed upon is that Muhammad has a special role at the time of judgment, thus elevating him to a unique status in relation to the rest of humanity.

Yes, Christians believe judgment has been granted to Jesus Christ, but since Jesus is God the Son, it is still God and God alone who has the ultimate say.

How ironic that Muslims revile at the idea of Jesus as intercessor, yet Muhammad, who never claimed deity as such, did claim to have special and unique powers of intercession for Muslims.

To recap this series, the shahada requires Muslims submit and believe in “a man”. The Qur’an equates Allah and Muhammad in ways that a man cannot be equated with God. Finally, the Hadith give Muhammad supremacy in ways no man could ever have. What conclusion is ultimately to be drawn? Muslims can continue to claim that they don’t worship Muhammad, and that is what is stated over and over again. Yet their creed, the Qur’an, their actions, and the Hadith tell a very different story.

[i] Sahih Bukhari: Volume 1, Book 4, Number 171

[ii] http://www.sunnah.org/msaec/articles/hadith_of_lawlaak.htm

[iii] Sahih Bukhari, Volume 1, Book 7, Number 331

[iv] Sahih Muslim, Book 30, Number 5655

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=149>



13. The Doves are in the Details

Posted on October 25, 2012 by Robert Sievers

In a [previous article](#), I discussed how all of Jesus' miracles were outwardly focused, and never benefited Himself. This was in contrast to Muhammad, whose miracle of the Qur'an often made his life on earth more pleasant. As I continue to study and read the gospels, there is another subtly different aspect to this phenomenon. Not only did Jesus never perform any miracles to make his human life any easier, he never did anything, whether miracle or mundane, that resulted in direct harm to others.

The aspect of Jesus' miracles never benefiting Himself while also not performing any action harming others might seem to be two sides of the same coin, but is there any evidence of this? While reading the gospels, I was intrigued by the passage of Jesus cleansing the temple of moneychangers. I have heard people inappropriately cite this episode as proof of Jesus being angry, and therefore sinning. Of course this is a erroneous conclusion, as being angry is not in itself a sin ([Ephesians 4:26](#)).

Yet let's probe a bit deeper by imagining an outraged Jesus as He overturned the tables of those selling the sacrificial animals. Of course, on further inspection, we note His zeal for the Father was not self-motivated, but was rather an indictment against the routine abuse of God's law for profit. Not only that, the business was going on right in the outer court of the temple, where the God-fearing Gentiles would come to worship. Moreover, remember that the temple is the place specifically built to remind the Israelites of God's holiness.

Yet the question remains of whether Jesus financially hurt those selling the animals. Didn't the innocent fellow selling the sheep or oxen or doves get shafted as Jesus chased all the animals away? Interestingly enough, the Bible has an odd detail nestled within a broader passage that addresses this. Consider the larger animals, such as the sheep and oxen. The moneychanger would not lose his animal, as certainly the businessmen could track down a meandering cow or sheep after it had

been set loose. The doves are a different story though. Once the doves are let loose, they will fly away, never to be corralled again. If Jesus flipped over tables, scaring the doves away, he financially hurts someone else, and perhaps it could be argued this was harming others. So let's read John 2 carefully.

14 And He found in the temple those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. 15 And He made a scourge of cords, and drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; 16 and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business."

I have read John 2 dozens of times and never noticed this. He drives the owners out of the temple with their sheep and oxen. They could corral them easily enough. However, those with the doves he orders to leave. They are given the opportunity, (and apparently took it) to take them away of their own volition. In this way, the dove sellers were not directly hit with a loss of merchandise.

It's possible that I might be making more out of this passage than is there, but I don't think so. The gospels contain the most unusual details, and I believe they are there for a reason. As the Word of God, the depth of the Bible is never ending. Tucked away as a seemingly irrelevant detail, here we see yet another example of Jesus' way of operating. It's true this article doesn't deal directly with Islam, but it just expands on an aspect of who Jesus is when considering how His actions affected others.

Even in this indignant state of removing the sacrificial animals, he does so in such a way as to avoid harming others. This is the Jesus whose actions, whether miraculous or mundane, always point outwardly, and never occur for his own self-satisfaction.

"Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." ([Matthew 20:28](#))

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=159>



14. What Kind of People Are We?

Posted on [November 4, 2012](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

The more I investigate Islam, the more spiritual reversals come leaping to the forefront. Sometimes these theological inversions are incredibly profound, and teaching me something new about Christ I had not seen before. Sometimes they teach me something about myself.

As a person reads the Bible, it becomes quite evident that as people, we have fallen way short of what God wants from us. Passages such as [Jeremiah 17:9](#), [Psalm 143:2](#), and [Romans 3:12](#) leave no doubt as to our status before God. Of course, God's sanctifying work allows us to receive a new heart, and to become a new creation ([2 Corinthians 5:17](#)).

Yet when we examine ourselves, we have to be honest. Consider what Paul had to say about himself as he wrote to other believers. In one of the earliest epistles, the letter to the church at Corinth, Paul admits that he has some flaws. As an apostle, he garners a certain status, but he seems to feel unworthy of it and places himself at the bottom of the apostle's ranking ([1 Corinthians 15:9](#)). Later, in the letter to the Ephesians ([Ephesians 3:8](#)), Paul doesn't even mention his apostleship, but rather puts himself as the least of all those who call themselves believers in Jesus Christ. Yet Paul doesn't stop here. In one of the latest books, Paul keeps lowering his self-appraisal, this time acknowledging that he considers himself the foremost of sinners ([1 Timothy 1:15](#)).

As time goes by, Paul's view of himself continues to lessen. While such statements could be misused by taking them out of context, let's stay focused and figure out where this self-deprecating attitude might come from. Jesus tells a parable that sheds some light on Paul's statements. In Luke 14, Jesus tells a parable about how to position yourself relative to others.

8 "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, 9 and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. 10 But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you.

In case there is any doubt about what this parable means, Jesus interprets it for us as well.

11 For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

The command is clear. Don't think too much of yourself. Don't assume a position of honor, but rather, consider yourself the least of those present. For myself, I can testify that I should not try to make myself out to be somebody or something that I am not. While I enjoy writing these articles, I know full well that however God is using me, He is using a flawed and broken human. I rejoice that God can do so in whatever way He sees fit, just as Paul acknowledges in [1 Timothy 1:16](#).

So what is the Muslim view? As you might expect, it's the exact opposite. Muslims are to regard themselves as the people most to be honored.

[3.110] You are the best of the nations raised up for (the benefit of) men; you enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong and believe in Allah; and if the followers of the Book had believed it would have been better for them; of them (some) are believers and most of them are transgressors.

Should anyone think I am taking this verse out of context, consider what ibn Kathir says about this verse in his tafsir, “The meaning of the Ayah [verse] is that the Ummah [body of believers] of Muhammad is the most righteous and beneficial nation for mankind.” [\[i\]](#) As for Muhammad himself, “The Ummah of Muhammad achieved this virtue because of its Prophet, Muhammad, peace be upon him, the most regarded of Allah's creation and the most honored Messenger with Allah.”

What we have again is a completely reversed way of thinking. Paul was humbled at the thought of being any kind of spokesman for God; Muhammad considered himself honored. As Christians, we are to take the place of least honor, recognizing that we are not to exalt ourselves, whereas the Muslims are to consider themselves the “best of the nations.” The attitude is the total antithesis of what Jesus commands.

<http://www.quran4u.com/Tafsir%20Ibn%20Kathir/PDF/003%20Imran.pdf>, p 179

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=164>

15. The Hands of Thieves

Posted on [November 15, 2012](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

The more I learn about Islam and Christianity, the more I am amazed at just how many opposites there are. Some are quite tricky to spot, some are huge eye openers, and others seem so obvious after you consider them even briefly. It is into the last category that this article falls.

Shari'a law is the standard within Islam. While it is true that implementation of that law varies from country to country, it is also true that from the Muslim perspective, Shari'a law is reckoned to be the exact law of Allah. A Muslim in Riyadh experiences it differently than one in Istanbul, and understanding why would require an entire volume to explore. At the most basic level, though, the Qur'an lays out the rules for what it declares to be the perfect society, and it is one particular tenet of this law which we will scrutinize.

The Qur'an lays out a specific punishment for theft.

[5.38] *And (as for) the man who steals and the woman who steals, cut off their hands as a punishment for what they have earned, an exemplary punishment from Allah; and Allah is Mighty, Wise.*

Within the Hadith, there are various criteria by which this punishment can be averted. For example, if the robber is not sane or if the item was less than a particular value, less harsh measures can be taken. Many Islamic writers spend time justifying the just nature of this law, citing the various exceptions. Additionally, these authors discuss how it is justified by citing that the benefits of having the law as a deterrent outweigh the disadvantages of its implementation. Yet whatever criteria are used, and whatever the purpose behind the law, ultimately the Qur'an dictates that the punishment for intentional, serious, and provable theft is amputation.

As usual, rather than being accused of taking a verse out of context, I have included Muhammad's own words with reference to this verse. As reported by ibn Kathir,

Muhammad said this regarding the verse in question, referring to himself in the third person,

“By Him in Whose Hand is my soul! If Fatimah the daughter of Muhammad stole, I will have her hand cut off.” [\[1\]](#)

At this juncture, many people begin to discuss the justness of this law, what it says about the god who mandates such laws, and so on. Yet for just a moment, let's just accept the Muslim position that such a law is for society's best. How does this compare to what the Bible says, and what does that tell us about God?

In the book of Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 28, the Bible states what thieves should do.

He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.

Firstly, the thief is commanded to stop stealing, and of course that seems a no-brainer. Yet consider the follow-up. The thief is to labor, with his own hands (plural) to help others. The thief is instructed to use the very same hands formerly used in robbery to provide for others, to give to others rather than taking from them. Of course societies with laws to protect the innocent require restitution and possible incarceration, depending on the severity of the crime. Yet ultimately, after civil penalties have been paid, instead of being an amputee that would likely be a burden to the rest of society, the ex-criminal is to unburden others in need. To do so, he is to labor with the same hands once used as instruments of sin. What a microcosmic picture of God's redemptive plan.

On a much higher plane, God uses us, all sinners at heart, to labor for the kingdom in whatever way He calls us. It's part of His master plan. If past sin prevented us from performing good works because of our new found love for God, everyone on the planet would be excluded from participation in His kingdom work. Yet praise be to God! Tongues which once blasphemed are called to praise Him. Minds which once had a bevy of impure thoughts are called to use wisdom to promote His kingdom purposes. Feet that once ran toward evil now hasten to help those in need. So too, God does not want our past robberies to preclude us from being able to work with our hands and restore that which was lost.

In Christianity, former instruments of sin are used to help others. In Islam, they are to be cut off. Complete reversal of attitude. Which is better?

[i] <http://www.quran4u.com/Tafsir%20Ibn%20Kathir/PDF/005%20Mai'dah.pdf>

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=168>



16. The Need for a Diversion

Posted on [November 26, 2012](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

In the [inaugural article](#) of this blog, the hijra was contrasted with the cross. In a [subsequent article](#), the behavior of Ali ibn Abi Talib was examined in light of how it inadvertently preaches the very aspect of the gospel that Muslims typically denounce. In this last look at the hijra, let's take one more look at Muhammad and Jesus from another angle.

Remember, the hijra was accomplished through the help of Ali ibn Abi Talib, who impersonated Muhammad on the night he was to be assassinated, allowing Muhammad the opportunity to escape unnoticed. Muhammad called his cousin Ali, and hatched the plot to have Ali put in harm's way so that the leader of the fledgling new religion would have a better chance of escape. Ali's act of bravery is well known within Islam. Of course, as much as a Muslim may praise Ali for this or any other of his acts, Muhammad is deemed as the person within Islam most to be praised.

Indeed, in Islam, Muhammad is the example to be followed (Qur'an 33:21). Yet in this case, it was Ali who stepped up and did what Muhammad was unwilling to do, put his life on the line. In a strange way, by praising Ali, Muslims inadvertently admit that Muhammad was outclassed on this particular occasion. Of course, saying this will cause an immediate and visceral reaction, so care must be taken. Deep down, do Muslims know Muhammad's character got eclipsed on this day by Ali? If so, that could never, and will never, be explicitly stated.

Yet let's move on to the main point. There were many times Jesus faced danger of persecution. For example, in [Luke 4:29-30](#) he was about to be pushed off a cliff, but

quietly slipped away by walking right through the crowd. In [John 7:30](#) and [John 7:44](#) the Bible says the Jews were seeking to kill Him, yet no one laid a hand on Him. In [John 8:59](#) the Jews picked up stones in order to stone Him, but He hid Himself and went out of the temple.

As Christians, we often look to Jesus to see what He did. In fact, there was a large WWJD movement in years past, which stood for “What Would Jesus Do?” While this is a great question, there is an equally valid question that is rarely if ever asked. What Would Jesus NOT do? While the omission of any particular event does not prove its non-existence, there are certain conclusions that can be drawn from things Jesus was never reported to have done. In this case, we find as listed above several references to times when He was in physical danger. Of course, His hour had not yet come, but move past that for a moment. How did Jesus escape these times when His life was threatened? The Bible doesn’t go into a lot of detail, but here is one thing Jesus did NOT do. He never put His disciples in harm’s way. Never once did He ask Peter, John, or Andrew to run interference for Him. Never once did He ask Thomas or Simon to create a diversion so that He could safely retreat from danger. Even when on his own initiative Peter used his sword to defend Him, Jesus instructed to him stop. ([Luke 22:49-51](#))

It is true that Jesus’ disciples faced severe persecution later, after Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. However, this happens as result of following Jesus’ example, not as a result of protecting His physical presence during the time of His incarnation.

So comparing Jesus and Muhammad reveals yet another clear opposite manner of behavior. Not once did Jesus ever ask His disciples to aid in His protection. Muhammad generated a scheme to put his cousin Ali at risk so that he could have a better chance at escape. This is something Jesus would never do. Jesus would never put His followers at risk to benefit Himself. Muhammad, however, was more than willing to do so. In fact, it was Muhammad who came up with the plan and summoned Ali and convinced him to go through with the plan.

As always, by studying Islam I learn so much about Christianity. By learning of what Muhammad does, I learn by inference so much about what Jesus would not do. Glory and praise be to the God who, when existing as a human, never put His own safety before others. What a marvelous and lofty standard for us to follow.

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=173>



17. The Crime of Shirk

Posted on [December 6, 2012](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

There are many aspects of Islam which are hard to pinpoint; gray areas that require in-depth study by Islamic scholars. These scholars examine Islamic historical accounts, rulings, and schools of law, and occasionally come to differing conclusions. However, one aspect of Islam that is in no way under any debate or doubt is shirk, the ultimate crime. Shirk is the crime of associating partners with Allah. In other words, if a Muslim in any way denies the oneness (tawheed) of Allah, he has committed this most heinous sin. There is 100% agreement among all Muslims that this is the one sin that must never be committed. The seriousness of shirk is seen both as it compares to other sins as well as Allah's unique response to it.

Its severity is stated this way by one Muslim author,

“Murder, rape, child molesting and genocide. These are all some of the appalling crimes which occur in our world today. Many would think that these are the worst possible offenses which could be committed. But there is something which outweighs all of these crimes put together: It is the crime of shirk.” [\[i\]](#)

The Qur'an is correspondingly very explicit about the results of committing shirk. While all other sins might be forgiven, the sin of shirk is the lone exception. It will not be forgiven under any circumstance. Qur'an 4:48 says,

“Surely Allah does not forgive that anything should be associated with Him, and forgives what is besides that to whomsoever He pleases; and whoever associates anything with Allah, he devises indeed a great sin.”

To be clear, Islam teaches that if a Muslim commits shirk, he can still repent, in essence becoming a Muslim for a second time, and thus perhaps be saved. However, unlike other sins, a soul dying in a state of shirk is doomed to hellfire, no exceptions.

So what does any of this have to do with Christianity? Of course, Christians also believe that God has no partners. Yet our job here is delve deeper, so consider the

core of what it requires to be saved. In [John 3:18](#) Jesus tells us that we must believe in His name, the only begotten Son of God. We must confess Jesus ([Matthew 10:32](#)), and we must truly believe He died and rose again ([Romans 10:9-10](#); [1 Corinthians 15:2-4](#)). We also must come to Him in order to receive this life ([John 5:40](#); [John 10:9](#); [Acts 2:21](#)). By doing this, from the Muslim point of view, Christians have committed shirk, the unforgivable sin. Believing that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh is exactly the most abominable thought a Muslim could ever have.

Note the connection between how Christians find salvation and the unforgivable sin in Islam. They are one in the same. In other words, the road to true reconciliation with God is that which is portrayed as the worst possible avenue of action a Muslim could take. The simplicity of this reversal is fiendishly constructed. The pathway to true light and forgiveness is marked in Islam as being the only route never to take. There could not be a more antithetical relationship in how each religion depicts the incarnation of Jesus.

People often ask me why I am so interested in Islam. I can guarantee that it is not because of the fascinating theological reversals I write about here. The reason why I love Muslims so much is because I grieve at the traps that have been laid before them. The doorway out of the darkness which is called Islam has a sign on it telling Muslims that is the one and only door they cannot ever dare to step through. Even Christians who understand Islam often just see Muslims as having an incomplete understanding of God, rather than recognizing the devious snares that lie in wait on the path of Muslim seekers. Christians who share the good news do not realize they are asking Muslims to commit the very worst crime imaginable. As traps go, it is one of the most cleverly and insidiously designed ever encountered. In my opinion, this should move all us to indescribable compassion for the Muslims of our world.

[i] <http://www.allaahuakbar.net/shirk/crime.htm>

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=178>



18. Athanasius on Islam

Posted on [December 13, 2012](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

My favorite patristic author is St. Athanasius. His work *On the Incarnation* is one of the best books I have ever read, and I highly recommend it to anyone. The fact that it was written in the 4th century makes it all the more worthy of our attention.

Athanasius lived roughly two centuries before Muhammad, thus making the title of this article anachronistic. Yet possibly one of the most astounding pieces of his work is how he dispels a common Muslim misperception. As he deals with the paradox of how Jesus could be both all man and all God, he turns the upside-down Islamic view of Jesus completely right-side up.

Muslims are constantly referring to aspects of Jesus' humanity in an attempt to disprove His deity. The Muslim theory goes that if Jesus engaged in human behavior, He could not be God. Of course, since Jesus was both all man and all God, proving He was human does not in any way invalidate the fact that He was also God. If you read various Christian and Muslim web sites, what you will find is article after article quoting the Qur'an and the Bible in attempts to refute and counter-refute each other's arguments. Is there a simple yet overarching theological truth buried here that can unravel this debate?

Consider one particular aspect of the Muslims' assault on Jesus' incarnation. The argument goes that Jesus, as a man, was required to do a variety of humiliating bodily functions that normal humans do. As such, He could not be God in the flesh, as God would not defile Himself by the baser aspects of human existence. Here is a typical example of a Muslim's perspective:

"The Quran says that Jesus and his mother, they both used to eat earthly food, like all other human beings; they were both servants who used to eat food (i.e. they used to defecate like any human being), and one who is such cannot be a god because of his compound being and fallible nature, and because of the [impurities such as] urine and excrement that he produces." [\[i\]](#)

In other words, Jesus could not be God because being human means being impure, while God is pure and cannot be defiled.

So what did Athanasius have to say on the subject? While writing about God becoming human, he considers this exact question. The two possibilities are as

follows. The first option is that an incorruptible God could be corrupted by humanity. The second is that a corruptible humanity would be purified by God. Muslims believe the former, while Christians believe the latter. Consider what St. Athanasius said:

“Not even His birth from a virgin, therefore, changed Him in any way, nor was He defiled by being in the body. Rather, He sanctified the body by being in it.” [\[ii\]](#)

A few sentences later, Athanasius says the same thing in another way,

“Just as the sun is not defiled by the contact of its rays with earthly objects, but rather enlightens and purifies them, so He Who made the sun is not defiled by being made known in a body, but rather the body is cleansed and quickened by His indwelling.” [\[iii\]](#)

Here we are faced with a simple choice. Which force is stronger, the impure nature of humanity, or the incorruptible nature of God? The answer seems straightforward to me. How could being all man and all God degrade or contaminate God? Rather, wouldn't we expect the human nature of Jesus to be elevated and purified by His deity? Physical acts notwithstanding, the conclusion is that God was not made impure by living life as a human, but rather that God the Son was the perfect sacrifice because of His unique make-up.

Again, we see a diametrically opposite view of the God of the Bible and Allah of the Qur'an. Christians recognize that a pure and holy God can overcome anything, including the potentially unclean aspects of being human. Muslims believe these unclean aspects of the human existence would forever taint an all powerful creator.

Once again, Islam has a completely antithetical approach to who God is.

[i] <http://www.experiencefestival.com/wp/article/in-the-quran-jesus-used-to-defecate-and-urinate-like-any-man>

[ii] Athanasius, St. On the Incarnation. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993, p45-46.

[iii] *ibid*, p46

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=184>



19. Athanasius, Islam and Repentance

Posted on [December 28, 2012](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

Start with wrong assumptions, and invariably you will end up with wrong conclusions. The problem is that it is quite difficult to recognize what the assumptions of any system actually are. Humans take so much for granted, whether due to our culture, our religion, or our experiences, that we get locked into one way of thinking without seeing why our own invalid assumptions are leading us to incorrect conclusions.

Consider God's mechanism for forgiveness. Just how do humans receive forgiveness? Do you just ask for it or is there something else required? In both Christianity and Islam, to gain forgiveness requires repentance. On the surface, someone might conclude both religions are similar. Yet as usual, when a person digs deeper, a great theological divide emerges.

To unravel this difference, let's go all the way back to the beginning, Adam's disobedience. In Christianity, the fall of man is an incredibly significant event. Adam's sin initiated a sequences of events, one of which was causing sin to afflict the entire human race ([Romans 5:12](#)). The ground was cursed, and Adam was informed that he would once again return to dust ([Genesis 3:19](#)). Death had now entered the world, and God's creation, created in His own image, would now perish. In Islam the story is similar, but with a critical difference. Adam's sin is viewed by Islam as having no lasting consequence. According to the Qur'an (2:37), Adam asked for forgiveness and received it. As far as Islam is concerned, that's the end of the story. For example, one Muslim web site puts it this way,

Therefore, even though the Quran mentions the sin of Adam and how he was banished from the Garden, it places no responsibility on the shoulders of his progeny. [\[i\]](#)

So here is the critical difference. In Christianity, the fall of man was the beginning of the sin nature of man, a curse which always ends in death. How does a just God simply ignore our sinful nature? Even if a person repents of a sin, there are myriad more to deal with. What about the underlying problem of the heart now governed by the propensity to sin ([Jeremiah 17:9](#))? Conversely, in Islam, the mistake of Adam was followed by his repentance, and that was that. While Muslims are instructed to follow

his example of asking for forgiveness, there is no original sin and therefore no other relevance.

How does this all tie back to the Christian and Muslim view of how to receive forgiveness? In Christianity, since humans are now inherently bent toward sin, there needs to be a mechanism not just to forgive any one particular sin, but rather to change our entire sin nature. Islam teaches that people are not inclined to sin, therefore repentance is all that is required. In the 4th century, Athanasius commented on this errant view,

“Had it been a case of a trespass only, and not of a subsequent corruption, repentance would have been well-enough; but when once transgression had begun men came under the power of the corruption proper to their nature...” [\[ii\]](#)

In other words, Athanasius recognized that if you start with the assumption that man was not corrupted by the fall, you will come to the conclusion that repentance alone would be sufficient to regain a right standing with God. However, with the realization that the entrance of sin into the world had permanent ramifications, the mechanism for repentance would require help from God Himself.

“His part it was, and His alone, both to bring again the corruptible to incorruption, and to maintain for the Father His consistency of character with all.” [\[iii\]](#)

So how does man, who now has a sinful nature, return to his state before the fall? Here God foresaw the dilemma and therefore had already made provision for the solution. He Himself would come, and conquer death ([Romans 5:19](#)). By so doing, He maintained consistency with His command that sin would result in death, but also with His goodness in that His creation, once corrupted, would have a way of reconciliation and thus would not fade into nonexistence from death and permanent separation from Him.

The point in all this is that Islam starts with a flawed assumption, that sin did not pass into all humanity from the fall of Adam. If you start with that assumption, you will invariably come to the wrong conclusion that repentance, apart from Christ, would be enough (Qur'an 110:3). In this one aspect, I must admit Islam is internally consistent. However, since man does have a sinful nature, there must be a way for that repentance to have efficacy. That way is provided by God Himself via the death of His Son ([Romans 5:18](#)).

Without an understanding of the intrinsic sinful nature of man, it is logical to not understand the need for a Savior.

[i] <http://knowingallah.com/v2/Document.aspx?id=1469&lang=en>

[ii] Athanasius, St. On the Incarnation. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993, p33

[iii] ibid

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=190>



20. Judas to the Rescue

Posted on January 6, 2013 by Robert Sievers

Much has been written on this blog and elsewhere regarding the Islamic view of Jesus and His sacrifice. Yet the question stands of how can the Christian help a Muslim come to understand that what Jesus did was a gift given out of love? How does he come to know that substitutionary sacrifice is an honorable act, and not something to be ashamed of? Is there another way to bring this truth home without starting an argument?

Moreover, this particular topic refers to the foundational moment of Jesus' life, his crucifixion. Most religious discussions with Muslims wander off course down obscure rabbit trails. It would be preferable to linger and discuss the crucifixion in a constructive way. Yet the more focus that is placed on the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the resurrection, the more offensive and confrontational the conversations may become. There must be avenues to discuss these core doctrines of salvation in a new way without compromise.

Oddly enough, to get at the truth and power of the cross, let's dig deeper into the Muslim account of what occurred at the time of the crucifixion. The following is taken from the tafsir of ibn Kathir, a respected Qur'an commentator.

They surrounded `Isa [Jesus] in the house, and when he felt that they would soon enter the house or that he would sooner or later have to leave it, he said to his companions, "Who volunteers to be made to look like me, for which he will be my companion in Paradise?" A young man volunteered, but `Isa thought that he was too young. He asked the question a second and third time, each time the young man volunteering, prompting `Isa to say, "Well then, you will be that man." Allah made the young man look exactly like `Isa...When those surrounding the house saw the man who looked like `Isa, they thought that he was `Isa. So they took him at night, crucified him and placed a crown of thorns on his head. [\[i\]](#)

This is a story many Muslims are aware of, and are more than happy to share with Christians. In this account, Jesus was under pressure and about to be arrested. He needed a diversion in order to escape. This story portrays a young man willing to accept being made to look like Jesus, thus taking his place. In this way, the Jews would carry out their plan of crucifixion, but on the wrong person. As a reward for this offer, the would-be doppelganger was granted paradise for such a noble and honorable effort. By agreeing to be an alternate candidate for crucifixion, sacrificing himself for the greater good, the young disciple saved Jesus from the cross.

There is an incredible irony here. In order to prove how the Christians are misguided about the merits of substitutionary sacrifice, a story is created expressing the merits of substitutionary sacrifice! In other words, in order to prove that Christians are wrong about the honor of one man dying for another, they tell a story about one man who agreed to die for another. The double irony here is that some Muslims believe that Judas was the young disciple. [\[ii\]](#) The fact that Judas is the hero of the day could be unpacked to reveal many more hidden and sinister sides to the account. However, let's stay focused on the fact that an act cited in order to avoid the ignominy of a righteous one suffering showcases the nobility of a righteous young disciple suffering.

Muslims are quick to defend Islam at any cost. When a Muslim retells his version of the story, how Judas gave of himself to die for Jesus, he will vociferously and boldly proclaim the wonder and nobility of such a selfless act. With careful attention to the Holy Spirit, the friend to the Muslim can give him just enough room to allow him to undermine his own theology. Such an approach is not without danger. Those Muslims who are not seeking may see that they painted themselves into a corner, and there could be an acerbic reaction. It is paramount that enough of a friendship has been established to bear the weight of such an eye-opening discussion. As a debate

tactic, such a device is useless. As a method of leading a friend to truth, sometimes more shrewd strategies could be employed.

[i] Ibn Kathir, “The Evil Accusation the Jews Uttered Against Maryam and Their Claim that They Killed `Isa,” Tafsir Ibn Kathir Translation 26 October 2002, Dar-us-Salaam Publishing, 14 Jan, 2011.

<http://www.tafsir.com/default.asp?sid=4&tid=12730>, 14 Jan, 2011

[ii] Muhammad `Ata ur-Rahim and Ahmed Thomson Jesus, Prophet of Islam (London: Ta-Ha, 1996) 37.

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=195>



21. Personal Testimony of Robert Sievers

Posted on January 15, 2013 by Robert Sievers

This blog has been up and running for about six months now. I have been extremely honored by how many people have freely chosen to read many of these articles. Yet I have no idea who many of you are. At the same time, you don't know me either. So it seemed appropriate that I share a quick testimony. My hope is that you will do the same, and share with me how wonderful God is by relating how you came to faith in Christ.

As a child, my parents took me to church occasionally, but I never understood the gospel. As a college student, I developed into a flaming atheist. I argued with the campus preacher, and was so effective at it that he called me possessed and performed a mock exorcism on me one day right there at the campus student center. As time went on, I focused on my career in software and various hobbies. During this time, I encountered a number of Christians that didn't match my expectations.

Several years had passed since college, and I was working on starting my own business in the software industry. My sister had been a follower of Jesus for about eight years, and I felt responsible as her older brother to correct her regarding her “errant” theological beliefs. I knew I didn't want to attend church to do it, so I

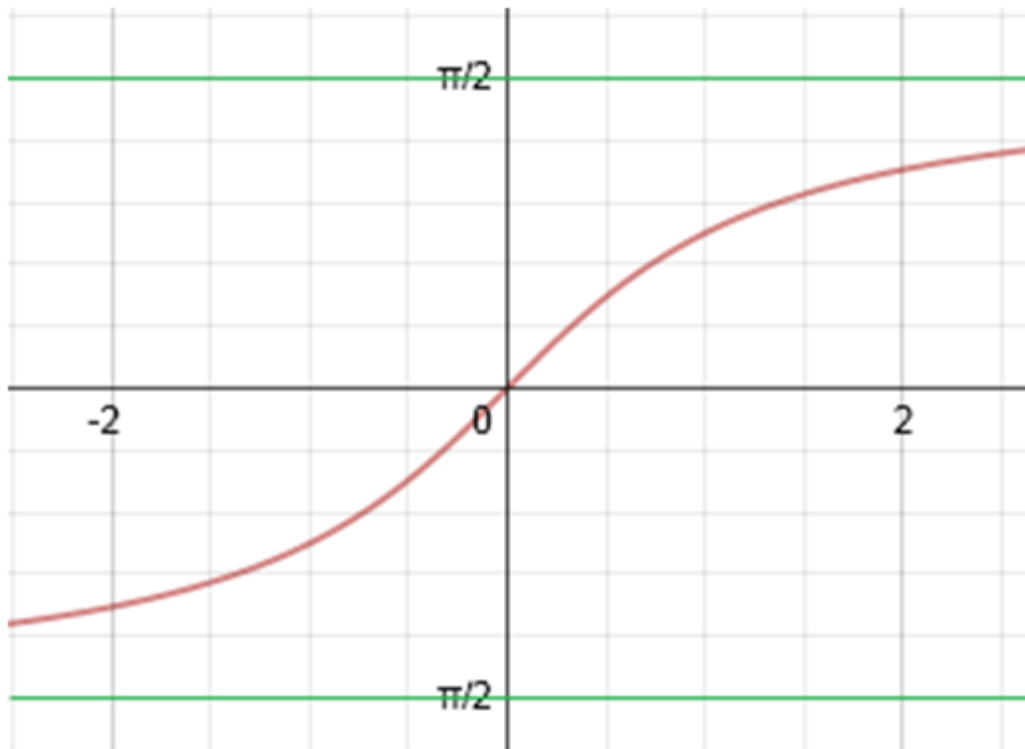
contacted my ex-next-door neighbor, a pastor at a local church. I asked him if I could launch some tough questions at him. He agreed and started a Bible study at a time I could conveniently attend. I started to pound away with questions, not knowing at that time that the anvil of Christianity had worn out many a hammer. [\[i\]](#)

One of the things that drew me in was watching people's visceral reaction to Jesus. Why were people so incensed about Jesus if He were merely a historical figure, a good teacher, or even some kind of religious prophet? The verses that stuck in my mind were [Matthew 10:34-36](#). To put it another way, if Jesus were unimportant, why did he say that He would be so divisive? This question stuck in my mind as I continued to investigate His claims. I call this my "hinge" verses; it was around this scripture that my mind turned.

This is a story that I am sure you have heard before. The more contradictions I thought I found, and the more paradoxes I brought to light, the more I started learning about who Jesus is, and why it was important. It was Monday, March 19, 2000, and I was reading Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis. He suggested a thought experiment. Imagine that you are not perfect. I thought, "Hey, that's easy!" Then, imagine that all God wants is for you to be sorry. Now, how could you truly be sorry, since you are not perfect? You can't really be 100% sorry, but might hold a little back. So then my mind continued down the same path, that all that would be required is to be sorry for the small part of you that wasn't sorry in the first place. But again, since you are not perfect, you cannot be perfectly sorry for the part of you that wasn't perfectly sorry, and so on to infinity. As someone well equipped in mathematics, I fully understood the concept of asymptotic functions, and recognized I could never reach the limit. It's like walking halfway toward a wall over and over again; you never actually reach the wall.

Then I read the next sentence, which explained that the only person who could truly be perfectly sorry would be someone who was perfect, and therefore would never need to be sorry in the first place. I set the book down in amazement and marveled at how simple this truth was, and asked myself how I could have missed it for so long. That was the moment of epiphany.

For you math geeks, the following picture represents what came into my head. It is the function $y = \arctan(x)$. It approaches $\pi/2$, but never gets there even if the independent variable goes to infinity.



But back to the main point, I have seen more prayers answered, and more strange things happen than anyone has a right to. I have endeavored to grow in knowledge and its corresponding application. In my short time as a follower of the triune God, I have been blessed beyond measure.

Of course this is only the intellectual piece of the story. It doesn't give credit to the prayers of others, and most importantly how the Holy Spirit was moving to reveal God to me in profound ways. Yet those are details which must wait for another telling.

I am the only person I know who God saved by using asymptotic math. Please share a little about yourself in the comments below.

[i] The quote above is a rough paraphrase of a statement originally purported to have been written by Theodore Beza to the king of Navarre in the 16th century.

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=199>



22. God the Most Generous

Posted on [January 31, 2013](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

Many of the articles I write for this blog incorporate an ironic twist. However, sometimes it is just interesting and eye-opening to examine the written interactions between Christians and Muslims of days long past. The number of such written documents that has survived from the medieval period is slim, but what there is contains some fascinating material.

One of the relatively early Christian apologists was Yahya b. ‘Adi. He lived under Islamic rule during the Abbasid dynasty in the tenth century. Many of the Arab Christian writers of both his day as well as from the previous generation quoted both the Qur’an and the Bible extensively. Yahya sometimes took a more philosophical approach toward Islam, though. One of his arguments for the reality of the incarnation I found particularly compelling. This particular polemic uses neither the Qur’an nor the Bible, but is founded solely on one of the ninety-nine names of Allah, and follows that name to its logical consequences.

Consider the title Allah the Most Generous. [\[i\]](#) Let’s start with the assumption that God is the most generous being who exists, has ever existed, or ever could exist, then follow that assumption to its logical conclusion. If God is the most generous entity in the universe, then by definition, God has not only the power but also the desire to share that generosity with his creatures. To be the most generous means not just that there is the ability to bestow blessing upon others, but that there is also the reality of pouring out those blessings. After all, a rich miser represents the very opposite of what generosity entails. Therefore, God has not only the most capacity to give, but would act correspondingly in the most generous fashion. He would give to His creatures that which is the best gift He could give. As one Islamic web site puts it, God would be “The One who is continually giving forth the grandest and most precious bounty”. [\[ii\]](#)

So what is the best gift God could give? The greatest thing in the universe is not financial or material, or even some abstract spiritual provision. The most awesome and wonderful thing in the universe is God Himself. Anything less would be second rate. The Creator is of more worth than any of His created objects. As the same Islamic web site states, God is “The One whose kind, noble and generous essence is most esteemed, valued and honored”.

To summarize, the logic is as follows.

1. God is most generous,
2. If God is most generous, then He would give most generously.
3. The best gift in existence is God Himself.
4. Therefore, a most generous God would not hold anything back, but rather give Himself.

What would it look like for God to give Himself to humanity? Here we now arrive to the reality of the incarnation. The incarnation is the logical outcome of the original premise. [iii] Anything less than the provision of God Himself given to humanity proves that God would not be the most generous creature in existence.

Of course such a discourse would meet a likely objection from Muslims that the incarnation would be impossible. This just forces the same issue down another path. Does such an impossibility of God fusing with man occur due to God's limitations? Clearly, God is all-powerful, and thus can do anything. If the reason for objection is that God would find the incarnation dishonoring rather than impossible, this shifts the conversation back to whether God is generous or not. If God refuses to give Himself, for any reason, this refusal confirms that His supposedly generous nature was subordinate to other concerns. Thus He truly would not be the most generous, as the most generous creature would give regardless of mitigating reasons.

This philosophical approach was much different than the other polemics of the day. I don't view such arguments as some type of silver bullet, and I don't advise anyone reading this to view it that way either. Such logical devices are useful under the right circumstances, but not in isolation. If you have a Muslim friend, this could be an interesting discussion. As a broadcasted call to faith in Christ, I remind everyone that such techniques have limited value.

[i] Arabic Al-Karim, although Yahya himself used the term Al-Jawwad.

[ii] http://wahiduddin.net/words/99_pages/karim_42.htm

[iii] Samir, Samir Khalil and Jorgan S Nielsen. Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period (750-1258). E.J. Brill: Leiden, The Netherlands, 1994, p74.

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=205>



23. The King's Physician

Posted on [February 27, 2013](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

Regular readers of this blog may have noticed I have recently had a propensity to discuss medieval Christian apologists. I must confess that I have been intrigued by the subject, and engaged in a little research into the area. While there are overarching themes within their writings that bear similarity to today, those observations must wait until later articles. For now, I wanted to comment on another interesting argument put forward by an early Arab Christian thinker.

One of the earliest apologists who engaged Islam with a systematic approach was Theodore Abu Qurrah. There is some dispute about the particulars of Abu Qurrah's life. What is known for sure is that he lived in the eighth century, was fluent in Arabic, and resided in Muslim occupied lands during the Abbasid dynasty. Born in Edessa and serving for a time in the Mar Sabas monastery, It is believed that his work was likely the first Christian work to be written in Arabic.

Abu Qurrah's main thrust was that the use of reason was enough to determine which religion was the correct one. While he has written an entire systematic treatise, one of the more unique analogies had to do with how to identify which view of God was the correct one. Abu Qurrah proposes that a truly wise and just God would send a messenger to humanity to carry His message to us. Of course false messengers would likely arise claiming to be God's spokesmen as well. The problem for us would be to determine which of the many individuals claiming to be God's messengers would be the genuine, and which were imposters. In order to do so, Abu Qurrah proposed the following allegory.

A king sent his son on a long journey. The king also sent along a wise physician to be with the son should trouble arise. As it happened, the lad did take ill. When the king heard the news, he sent a courier to the physician with the correct remedy. However, many of the king's enemies also caught wind of the son's illness, and sent their own messengers, each with phony remedies. Their intent was to exacerbate the ailment by providing fake medicine. The problem for the wise physician was to ascertain which messenger was the correct one, and which messengers had nefarious intentions. His solution was rather straightforward. He asked each of the envoys to describe the illness in detail for which they had brought the cure. The one who was correctly able to identify the symptoms would be the one who had true knowledge of the original report of the son's sickness. Abu Qurrah concludes the allegory,

And when among them there was only one description to bear a resemblance to him, the document in which it occurred would be the one in which there was the true description of his illness and the beneficial remedy. [i]

The allegory is rather obvious. The true messenger of God is the one who can accurately describe humanity's problem that only God can solve. So how does the Qur'an compare to the Bible when laying out our condition before the application of God's remedy? Jesus says that apart from Him we can do nothing ([John 15:5](#)) and that until we are born again of the spirit, we cannot ever enter the kingdom of God ([John 3:5-6](#)). The Bible has much more to say about this ([Jeremiah 17:9](#); [Romans 5:12](#)). According to the Bible, our sickness is unable to be overcome through our own power, that is, the disease of sin is inherent to our being. Islam, on the other hand, states that our problem is just one of weakness or forgetfulness. (Qur'an 39:8;20:115) Islam teaches that we are all born Muslim (Qur'an 30:30), and it is our parents that lead us astray. [ii]

So which is correct? Are we born with propensity to evil or with the true religion of God in our hearts that gets corrupted by others? Perhaps parents can answer this question best. Do parents teach their children to steal toys from other children, or do parents try to teach children to share because their natural tendency is otherwise? Which word does a child learn first, "yours" or "mine"? Do children tend to act selfishly, focusing on their own needs, or do they typically act selflessly, first considering the needs of others before their own?

As the king's physician, we must honestly diagnose the human heart's problem in order to recognize whether Jesus or Muhammad brings the right remedy.

[i] Samir, Samir Khalil and Jorgan S Nielsen. Christian Arabic Apologetics During the Abbasid Period (750-1258). E.J. Brill: Leiden, The Netherlands, 1994, p35.

[ii] Sahih Bukhari, USC-MSA web (English) reference : Vol. 2, Book 23, Hadith 440

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=210>



24. A Prophet Like Unto Moses

Posted on [March 10, 2013](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

The advent of the Messiah is the pinnacle of God's redemptive plan for everyone on this planet. Given the importance of this event, it was critical that God's people would know how to recognize Him when He came. There are various clues within the Old Testament, but perhaps none more laden with meaning than [Deuteronomy 18:18](#). In this verse, God relays through Moses the idea that someone else is coming. While the exact details are not spelled out, a pointer for recognition of this future prophet is given.

I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

What does it mean to be “a prophet from among their countrymen like you”? To be like Moses is rather vague. Muslims typically misuse Scripture in an attempt to find Muhammad in prophetic passages. Muslims will take passages such as the one above that clearly point to the Messiah, and hijack it by insisting that they point to Muhammad. [\[i\]](#) [\[ii\]](#) How can a reader of the Old Testament be confident that this verse points to Jesus, and not another prophet of the Old Testament, or even a self-proclaimed prophet such as Muhammad? In order to unwrap the true interpretation of this verse, it must be viewed in context as well as how it is referenced in the New Testament. In this and later follow-up articles, the Muslim's erroneous interpretation of the verse will be exposed, and the true meaning will be unpacked. By doing so, it will be shown yet again who Jesus is by seeing who Muhammad is not.

Thoughtful individuals know that context is essential to understanding Scripture. So what is chapter eighteen of Deuteronomy all about? Predominantly, it is about identifying false prophets. This is accomplished by warning people against the use of divination and spiritualists. These false diviners are easily determined by a track record of erroneous prophetic predictions. While prophecy itself is a much broader concept than just predicting future events, someone who incorrectly does so can immediately be recognized as a false prophet. [Deuteronomy 18:22](#) defines this lack of accurate prophetic utterance as the litmus test for prophethood. If anyone speaks prophecy that is not later fulfilled, God says such a person should not be considered a prophet.

22 When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him.

Inability to predict the future is a surefire way to recognize a false prophet. Muhammad never made any testable predictions, and therefore he cannot be confirmed as a prophet. Some Muslims may disagree with this, and therefore this topic will be expanded upon in more detail later. However, close analysis shows Muhammad does not utter any prophetic predictions that can be verified, and therefore the passage in Deuteronomy by necessity of logic cannot point to him.

Yet the means of identification for the true prophet referred to in Deuteronomy 18 still remains. One of the best ways to figure out what the Bible has to say is to let the Bible interpret itself. Errors in interpretation occur when proof texting a single verse out of context in an effort to shoehorn it into a theological agenda. Fortunately, God clarifies this important verse in other places in the Bible. The New Testament starts to shed some light on this by directly referencing this verse. In [Acts 3:20-22](#) Peter references the prophet like Moses and then announces that the verse referred to Jesus.

Peter's testimony in Acts provides enough Scriptural evidence to support the thesis that Deuteronomy 18 looks forward to Jesus and therefore not Muhammad. However, Jesus Himself also comments on His being foreshadowed by Moses. In [John 5:46](#) Jesus points out that Moses was referencing Him.

For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me.

Jesus doesn't quote Deuteronomy 18 specifically, and therefore may be more broadly referring to Moses' writings in general. Yet many scholars believe He may be directly referring back to Deuteronomy 18.

So without even going very far in depth, the Bible in the context of the passage excludes Muhammad from being the prophet "like unto Moses" mentioned in verse 18. It does so just four verses later in [Deuteronomy 18:22](#). Moreover, the Bible references itself making it evident that the passage in Deuteronomy 18 references Jesus, not Muhammad. In subsequent articles, the specific arguments of Muslim apologists will be shown to be in error, and the deeper meaning of what it means to be "a prophet like unto Moses" will be expanded upon.

[i] <http://www.islam-guide.com/ch1-3.htm>

[ii] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xrygtNHfxU>

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=219>



25. The Crusader Inversion

Posted on [May 3, 2013](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

Many of the recent articles here have had a medieval focus. Yet there has been a gaping omission with reference to this time period. It is quite likely that any dialogue with a Muslim will quickly migrate to one particular time in Christian history, the Crusades. Is there any strange inversion or ironic twist that might better help the Christian understand this infamous time in our history?

Both Muslim and Christian alike are aware of the Crusades, unarguably one of the greatest Christian atrocities of all time. When confronted with the topic of the Crusades, most Christians will respond that the actions of those of the time didn't reflect the teaching of Christ. Christians may also point out that there are good Christians and bad Christians, just as there are good Muslims and bad Muslims. These statements are true, but they miss the real point.

A little closer look shows what happened. While the global politics, societies, and events of the time were complex, there is a critical moment to note. This watershed moment was when Pope Urban II gave his speech in Clermont in 1095, asking Europeans to retake the Holy Land as Christian territory. Here is an excerpt from his speech.

"All who die by the way, whether by land or by sea, or in battle against the pagans, shall have immediate remission of sins. This I grant them through the power of God with which I am invested" [i]

Frequent readers of this blog will spot this irony more clearly before explicitly being spelled out. What Pope Urban II did in this speech is introduce the concept of

forgiveness of sins via death in battle into Christianity. This decree by the Pope came nowhere from Scripture and was a result of human error. Nowhere does our Lord Jesus Christ teach remission of sin for dying in battle. Rather, this teaching comes from Islam. It is unclear whether the Pope took this teaching from Islam, but the reality is that it is an Islamic teaching nonetheless. Those who disagree should ask themselves what other religion preaches salvation for dying in battle? Obviously Christians are disgusted at the concept of jihad within Christianity. It is embarrassing and distasteful when considering the mandate of Pope Urban II. He deviated from the teachings of Christ and imitated an element of Islamic doctrine.

At any rate, the events that followed this speech were disastrous. Christians melded an aspect of Islam into Christian thought wholesale, and Christians are still apologizing for it almost a millennium later. What is critical here is not that individual Christians of the 11th and 12th centuries engaged in brutal acts. What is critical is that Biblical ideology itself was viciously altered. This perverted ideology caused its followers to act in horrible ways. By papal decree, the concept of jihad, though not specifically named, was smuggled into a place where it never belonged, and never will belong.

So what is the point? The point is that the Crusades started as a result of jihad being declared. Does the Muslim applaud the teaching of jihad or not? This is a question that every Muslim should be asked. If they applaud jihad, then they should not be against the concept of the Crusades. If they denounce jihad, then they do not follow Islam. Many Muslims may react viscerally to this line of reasoning.

Muslims may counter that jihad is only warranted against infidels, so jihad is acceptable when perpetrated against others, but vicious and unwarranted when perpetrated against them. But why is this so? The concept of treating others as you wish to be treated as a moral code is one most people can relate to and will agree with ([Luke 6:31](#)). Why is it moral to treat someone else differently than you yourself would wish to be treated? Here the teachings of Jesus can be brought to bear on the topic. Notice that we have moved from arguing over the rightness or wrongness of the Crusaders, and gotten back to Jesus' message and its relevance for everyone.

To recap, in the case of Christianity, the height of brutality came when the Pope took a page from Islam and tried to shoehorn it into Christian theology. It is just too ironic to watch Muslims harangue Christianity for the one instance when it attempted to adopt an aspect of Islamic teachings. The question must be asked: Do Muslims

applaud the inclusion of this Islamic teaching into Christianity or do they denounce adopting this piece of Islam into Christianity? I hope this irony is not lost on you. Muslims condemn Christians of the 11th and 12th century for trying to adopt a tenet of Islam.

[i] <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/urban2-5vers.html>

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=226>



26. Activities in Heaven

Posted on June 13, 2013 by Robert Sievers

One of the most fascinating Christian apologists of the Medieval time period was Pierre Maurice de Montboissier, better known as Peter the Venerable. One of many observations he made about Christianity and Islam has to do with the ultimate destinations of the respective believers of each religion. He had much to say on the topic, pointing out striking difference between the two versions of heaven, and the implications of those differences.

But before we dive in to his theology, consider the time in which Peter the Venerable lived. During the Medieval period, Western Europe was woefully ignorant about Islam and its tenets. It was the early part of the twelfth century when Peter the Venerable, the head of the monastery of Cluny, became interested in Islam. He began to investigate the religion in order to evangelize Muslims. All he found were fables, rumors, or old wives tales about what Muslims believed. In an attempt to win Muslims, he found himself grossly handicapped by lack of knowledge. This frustrated him to action. Peter himself said

“I was indignant that the Latins did not know the cause of such perdition and, by that ignorance, could not be moved to put up any resistance; for there was no one who replied [to Islam] because there was simply no one who knew [about it]” [\[i\]](#)

Unlike previous Christian Arab apologists, Peter takes a more irenic tone throughout his treatise. Yet he did this without compromising core Christian values. His

emphasis was on understanding and evaluating Islamic doctrine in a fair and educated way. Yet his criticisms of Islam were well thought out and humbly delivered. What a great role model for us today.

One of the specific items Peter the Venerable discussed was the Christian and Islamic views of heaven. In Islam, there is a certain specificity about what paradise will be like. For example, in this verse of the Qur'an, those who go to heaven are rewarded with fine jewelry, nice clothes, and get to relax on comfortable sofas.

[18.31] These it is for whom are gardens of perpetuity beneath which rivers flow, ornaments shall be given to them therein of bracelets of gold, and they shall wear green robes of fine silk and thick silk brocade interwoven with gold, reclining therein on raised couches; excellent the recompense and goodly the resting place.

In other parts of the Qur'an, such as chapter 37:39-49 there are more descriptions of paradise, which include fruits, people being held in high regard, and chaste companions provided for the pleasure of those rewarded in paradise. Some people may argue that these descriptions of comfort, rest, and abundance are analogous to those references in the Bible, such as [Revelation 7:16](#) and [Revelation 22:2](#). Indeed, there are some similarities between Christianity and Islam.

However, there is one major difference, and it's critically important. Actually, it isn't even a difference, but rather an omission. What we learn about the Islamic view of heaven isn't so much about what we are told about it, but rather what is left out. What is glaringly absent in any descriptions of the Islamic heaven is the worship of God.

In Christianity, the worship of God in heaven is mentioned extensively. What the Bible describes regarding heaven isn't so much about what rewards will be given to us, but what our worship will be like toward God. Whole chapters of the book of Revelation describe the worship scene. [Revelation 4:11](#) presents a snapshot of the kind of praise we will be able to give God. In [Revelation 7:9-10](#) we get a picture of a massive throng of worshippers coming out of every people group on the planet! What rewards believers do get, we will give back to Jesus out of gratitude, just as the twenty four elders do ([Revelation 4:10](#)). To some, these extensive description of worship don't sound enjoyable, but that is because such aspects of our heavenly existence don't appeal to the satisfaction of our flesh.

Let's get back to our medieval predecessor, Peter the Venerable. He picks up on this omission and hints at the fact that Islamic heaven misses the spiritual components of worship. He notices that Islam only discusses those aspects of heaven correlated to earthly pleasures.

“He painted a paradise not of angelic society, nor of the vision of God, nor of that highest good which neither eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man ([Isaiah 64:4](#), [1 Corinthians 2:9](#)), but actually in such a way as he wished it to be prepared for himself. He promises to his followers there the eating of meats, and all kinds of fruits, there rivers of milk and honey and gleaming waters, there the embrace and sensual satisfaction of the loveliest woman and virgins, in which things his whole paradise is comprehended”. [\[ii\]](#)

In Islam, the focus is on the rewards God gives to us. In Christianity, the focus is on the worship that we will be able to give back to God. Heaven is much less about what we get; it's much more about who is there with us.

[i] Kritzeck, James. [Peter the Venerable and Islam](#). Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964, p30.

[ii] *ibid.*

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=238>



27. A Prophet Like Moses – Part II

Posted on [July 29, 2013](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

In a [previous article](#), we looked at the Muslim claim that Muhammad was the prophet mentioned in [Deuteronomy 18:18](#). While that article dealt with the immediate issue of the context of the passage and its immediate ramifications in relation to Muhammad, there is much more hidden within this verse. The stage is now set to examine in more detail what God meant when He said He would send a prophet like Moses. Was Moses symbolic of the Christ to come in some way, in many ways, or does he correspond to Christ in a more theologically tangible manner? What

about the Muslim claim that it was Muhammad that fit the model of a prophet like Moses?

In the art of Biblical interpretation, one common error is to draw too much meaning out of corresponding passages which narrate Old and New Testament events. For example, both Jesus and Abraham visited the town of Shechem, so can we as Biblical interpreters draw conclusions from this? Of course we cannot. Both Muhammad and Moses have names starting with the letter “M”, but what ramification does this have? Rather than create a litany of commonalities that contain little to no theological significance, only actions that have remarkable allegorical or symbolic meaning should be considered.

If we consider the most substantial connection between Moses and Muhammad, it would be the fact they each brought a systematic set of laws for the respective religious adherents to follow. This assertion has more credibility given the rarity of new ethical constructs put forward by someone claiming to speak for God. While both Muhammad and Moses did this, so too Jesus also brought a new law. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount, He says “You have heard that it was said....but I say to you.” ([Matthew 5:27-28](#)) Therefore, it is within this context that the deeper examination of Moses and Jesus must occur.

In order to compare Moses to Jesus or Muhammad, let’s consider the manner in which the laws of God were ratified. It was done so via a blood covenant. Laying out a clearly prescribed set of laws was different than other gods of neighboring territories, whose intentions and expectation were unknown. The covenant that God gave to Israel was more than a well-defined list of religious and civil statutes and ordinances to uphold. Contractually, following of these statutes insured blessings for Israel, while disobedience would lead to consequences. In that most basic sense, the law of Deuteronomy is similar to that law found in the Qur’an.

However, It is the ratification of this covenant that is of primary interest for the purposes of this writing. In Exodus 24, Moses instructed for some bulls to be sacrificed as burnt offerings and then the narrative continues:

8 So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

The covenant was ratified by shedding of blood. Scripture pointed to a new covenant in the future ([Jeremiah 31:31-37](#)), but successive generations reconfirmed the covenant that was already in place. When Jesus came on the scene, he informed His disciples that he was the one who would be establishing a new covenant. The confirmation of that covenant was again done by blood, this time His own. During the last supper, Jesus said in [Matthew 26:28](#),

for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.

In this verse, Jesus makes it known that He is establishing a new covenant, sealed with blood, just as Moses had done. By these words, He was “declaring that the covenant of Sinai now passes away in being fulfilled.” [\[i\]](#) Never before had a prophet been so brazen to introduce a new covenant sealed in blood. Only the coming Messiah, God Himself, could do so.

This idea of the blood covenant is so important that Christians, no matter what denomination, celebrate this new covenant when we take communion. It is one of the few religious traditions that can be found regardless of any doctrinal differences. Some churches feel communion is so important, it should be done every week. Other denominations feel communion is so precious and so serious, that months of preparation lead to a once per year Passover communion. Regardless of the method of delivery, or the frequency of occurrence, every church the world over takes time to solemnly remember this important truth; that Jesus was responsible for the new covenant sealed in blood.

So in what way did Muhammad bring a blood covenant? There is certainly nothing that I know of within Islam. So while it is true that Muhammad may have had some random commonalities with Moses, in religious traditions of gravity and consequence, Jesus stands uniquely as “the prophet like Moses.”

[i] Hebert, Gabriel. [When Israel Came Out of Egypt](#). Naperville, IL: SCM Book Club, 1961.

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=247>



28. Mideast Beast

Posted on [August 27, 2013](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

Like many Christians, I have a personal interest in Biblical prophecy. I have avoided publishing a lot of articles relating to end-times events, because that isn't what this blog is about. It's about Islam. Nevertheless, a few prophecy articles may slide in where they intersect with Islamic theology.

Given this interest, I recently read "Mideast Beast," by Joel Richardson. Joel is one of the most informed Biblical teachers and bloggers that I know. He runs a site over at www.joelstrumpet.com, and I would encourage my readers to check it out.



The book *Mideast Beast* takes aim at a longstanding Christian view that the Antichrist kingdom would be born out of some type of revived Roman Empire. For 2000 years, the majority Christian opinion has been that Rome was the 4th kingdom mentioned in Daniel 2, the 4th beast of Daniel 7, and the Antichrist kingdom spoken of in Revelation. However, Joel systematically dismantles this theory with a clear and a thorough approach. Instead of the Antichrist kingdom arising from a revived Roman Empire, Joel shows how the Bible teaches that the kingdom will be a conglomeration of nations, all of which are currently under Islamic governance.

Joel relies on Biblical passages heavily, and more importantly, in context. He pulls Scripture from Obadiah, Zephaniah, Micah, and all the places in the Bible that we don't go to first for our daily devotions. He takes the passages at face value, reading them for what they are and not trying to put some spin on them to justify his own position. He also quotes patristic fathers to show the historical backing for the ever-present minority view that the Antichrist kingdom would come out of nations currently under Islamic rule. This view is now gaining credibility within scholarly circles.

To understand why there has been so much confusion regarding the nature of the final Antichrist kingdom, we must examine a longstanding point of Biblical misinterpretation. There are always countless ways that the church steers off course throughout each age. One such error is replacement theology. Replacement theology teaches that the church has replaced Israel with reference to the promises made in

the Old Testament. Thus, this errant position holds that those promises made to Israel and are no longer in force for Israel as a nation after the advent of Jesus. Yet such a view cannot hold water in light of passages such as [1 Samuel 12:22](#), [Jeremiah 31:37](#), [Jeremiah 33:25-26](#), [Romans 11:1,5](#) and others. In other words, many Biblical students err by allegorizing passages relating to Israel, when in fact God still has a plan in place for his chosen people.

Yet while many people recognize the danger of replacement theology, they make an identical, but more subtle mistake. Similarly to Biblical passages that outlines Israel's role in events of the last days, so too the Bible names specific nations who will be judged at that same time. For example, countries named include Egypt, Libya, and Sudan ([Daniel 11:43](#)), Moab ([Isaiah 25:9-10](#)), present-day Turkey ([Ezekiel 38:2](#)), and Iran ([Ezekiel 38:5](#)). The point is that just as we should not allegorize passages about Israel, replacing them as if they related to the church at large, so too we should not allegorize passages about specific nations named for judgment, and somehow think a particular area will not undergo the prophecy spelled out for it. If God says He will judge a specific nation in the last days, what that means is that He will judge that specific nation in the last days.

But perhaps what I like most about Mideast Beast, and Joel's writing in general, is the conclusions he reaches after outlining these types of passages. The last chapter is titled "Loving Muslims." Many people view God's judgment as an excuse to write off these Islamic nations as a lost cause. Yet nothing could be farther from the truth. It is because of God's upcoming judgment against certain areas that we should be motivated to put even more effort into evangelizing and loving these people more than ever. Passages such as [Jude 23](#) implore us to love those who are destined for disaster if not for God's intervention through us. On an individual level, these are people who need to experience God's mercy and grace, and we are God's ambassadors ([2 Corinthians 5:20](#)). When I know that certain places are destined to undergo God's wrath, it breaks my heart for all those mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, and husbands and wives who have not yet heard about Jesus Christ and experienced the joy that comes with a relationship with Him. May God's name be glorified everywhere! I hope that you, too, have a revived sense of our call to preach Christ in these spiritually dark places.

The bottom line is that I highly recommend this book to anyone with an interest in either Islam or prophecy in general.

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=258>



29. When to Worship

Posted on September 25, 2013 by Robert Sievers

Every Sunday morning, Christians the world over gather together in churches, sing praises to God, and hear expositions of the Bible by learned leaders. Once a week on Saturday, devout Jews attend synagogue. Similarly, Muslims the world over attend weekly Juma prayer on Friday. From the surface, a casual observer would conclude that this proves that all religions are essentially equal. They all meet once a week for services which follow roughly similar formats. Yet, as usual, digging deeper doesn't just show differences; it illustrates complete antithetical aspects between Christianity and Islam.

The timing of when Christians attend services is not arbitrary. Deep meaning is embedded within traditions that we take for granted today. In the early church, Jews who chose to follow Jesus started meeting on Sunday mornings instead of Saturday. Whether this happened suddenly or gradually over time we cannot be sure. However, what we do know is that within a few years after the crucifixion, Sunday was a day that held special prominence. For example, the book of 1 Corinthians is one of the earliest books written in the New Testament. In it we find Sunday was the day for tithing. ([1 Corinthians 16:1-2](#))

1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. 2 On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.

Sunday was also the day for communion, as evidenced in [Acts 20:7](#)

7 On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.

The reason for this transition is readily apparent. The first Christians moved the time of worship from Saturday to Sunday in order to celebrate the resurrection. Since Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday morning, this was the most logical time to gather to celebrate this pivotal moment in history.

So why do Muslims worship at noon on Friday? From a pragmatic standpoint, there are historians who offer various theories, but from a theological viewpoint, the answer is unclear. The Qur'an tells Muslims to congregate on Friday, but doesn't offer much insight as to why this time is selected. The only relevant verse comes from Surah 62, verse 9.

O you who believe! when the call is made for prayer on Friday, then hasten to the remembrance of Allah and leave off trading; that is better for you, if you know.

While the Hadith also discuss meeting on Friday, so too no specific reason is offered as to why the day of worship was moved to Friday.

Narrated Abu Huraira: I heard Allah's Apostle (p.b.u.h) saying, "We (Muslims) are the last (to come) but (will be) the foremost on the Day of Resurrection though the former nations were given the Holy Scriptures before us. And this was their day (Friday) the celebration of which was made compulsory for them but they differed about it. So Allah gave us the guidance for it (Friday) and all the other people are behind us in this respect: the Jews' (holy day is) tomorrow (i.e. Saturday) and the Christians' (is) the day after tomorrow (i.e. Sunday)." [\[1\]](#)

Here Muhammad says that the day of worship is prescribed to be Friday, just to be different from the Jews and Christians. So what if any conclusions can be drawn about a worship time of Friday at noon? To unravel this, let's return to the Christian time of worship, Sunday morning. This was the time marking when Jesus conquered the grave, once and for all. So what was happening two days earlier on that previous Friday? Jesus was being crucified. In fact, something very specific happened at noon on that Friday. From [Mark 15:33 \(NLT\)](#)

33 At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock.

The darkness that fell is associated with judgment and with Jesus' separation from the Father. Somehow Jesus was taking the full brunt of God's wrath, experiencing rejection from the Father during these final hours of His earthly life spent in

unimaginable agony. This is the time of the week that Muslims are told to congregate.

Rather than draw any hasty conclusions as to the causes behind this difference, let's just review the facts. There is not a specific reason given within Islam for meeting on Friday. Christians worship on Sunday morning, the time of Jesus' resurrection. Muslims worship at Friday noon, the time when darkness fell over the earth. Christians gather at the time of Jesus rebirth, Muslims at the time of His impending death.

What appears at first to be similar traditions turns out to hold an ironic and opposite twist when examined in more detail. Could there have been spiritual forces at work behind the time chosen for Muslims to congregate? As always, I invite and await your comments or criticisms.

[i]

http://www.searchtruth.com/book_display.php?book=13&translator=1&start=0&number=1#1

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=277>



30. The gospel of adoption

Posted on October 27, 2013 by Robert Sievers

If you tried to summarize the entire theme of the Bible in one sentence, it would be about how God is working to restore the broken relationship between Himself and His creatures. There are many details as to why the break happened, how God calls us back to Him, and the provisions He has made for us to restore the relationship. So too there are many metaphors presented to describe the kind of the relationship that He calls us to. Once such picture is that of adoption. God refers to us as His children. This type of language immediately can put Muslims on guard given the main debating point about whether Jesus is the Son of God. Is there anything new that can be added to this discussion when seen through the lens of the metaphor of adoption? I believe there is.

Before I can get to new ground through, some old terrain must quickly be covered. The Bible uses the term Son of God to refer to Jesus as the uniquely created Son of God who inherited God's attributes ([John 5:18](#)). It also uses the term in a generic sense to refer to all those who follow God. Therefore, in one sense of the word, everyone who is led by the Spirit of God is a son of God ([Romans 8:14](#)). Yet it must be remembered that this inheritance stems from adoption, not from a direct transfer of God's substance ([Rom 8:15](#); [Gal 4:5](#)). When I put my faith in Jesus, God accepted me. That acceptance comes because he adopts me into His family. I don't belong there. But it is by God's grace and mercy that He allows me to be, even though I don't deserve it by birthright.

Verses such as [Romans 8:23](#) and [Ephesians 1:5](#) reinforce this picture of adoption. It paints a beautiful picture of how a father takes in orphaned children, treating them as his own. This picture of love and grace aids us in understanding God's dealings with us in a palpable way. And so it isn't surprising that throughout Scripture, God's concern for the orphan is a theme often revisited ([Deuteronomy 10:18](#), [Isaiah 1:17](#), [James 1:27](#)).

So what does Islam say about adoption? Does the Qur'an have anything to say regarding how Muslims are supposed to treat those who are brought into a family? As a matter of fact, it does:

[33.4-5] Allah has not made for any man two hearts within him; nor has He made your wives whose backs you liken to the backs of your mothers as your mothers, nor has He made those whom you assert to be your sons your real sons; these are the words of your mouths; and Allah speaks the truth and He guides to the way. Assert their relationship to their fathers; this is more equitable with Allah; but if you do not know their fathers, then they are your brethren in faith and your friends; and there is no blame on you concerning that in which you made a mistake, but (concerning) that which your hearts do purposely (blame may rest on you), and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.

In other words, adoption has a very different meaning within Islam. You can bring an orphan into your home, but Allah commands that they are never supposed to be your "real sons." Their relationship to their birth fathers is paramount, even that their last names should not be changed. Modern Islamic apologists downplay these verses as trying to protect lineage. But early Islamic commentators saw it differently. [\[i\]](#)

Consider what ibn Kathir, a respected early commentator on the Qur'an says about these verses:

“your adoption of him is just words, and it does not mean that he is really your son, for he was created from the loins of another man, and a child cannot have two fathers just as a man cannot have two hearts in one body” [\[ii\]](#)

In Islam, adoption is something very different than in Christianity. In Islam, you can take in an orphan, but there is always a distinction made so that the child knows he isn't “really” your son.

This blog is all about the contrasts between Christianity and Islam. These differences don't just exist; they expose significant diametrically opposite approaches. In Christianity, adoption is given as an allegory for God's redemptive plan. In Islam, adoption is redefined in order to ensure those taken in to another family are forever aware they can never truly be a part of it the way a natural born son is.

In Christianity, adoption is one of the most powerful pictures of God's redemptive plan of grace. In Islam, adoption is recast and redefined in order to deny full acceptance of orphans.

[i] <http://en.islamtoday.net/guessshow-16-786.htm>

[ii]

http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1873&Itemid=89

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=290>



31. The Punishment for Adultery – Part II

Posted on [November 17, 2013](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

In a [previous article](#), I discussed the issue of the Islamic mandate for stoning adulterers. In that article, I hinted that some Muslims state that the penalty for adultery is not stoning, but rather one-hundred lashes. I researched this quite extensively, and as usual, there is much more to the story.

Therefore, this article will take a more polemic tone. I must confess that I often get frustrated when listening to Muslims describe their own religion. For example, this Muslim speaker [\[i\]](#) denies that stoning for adultery is an Islamic teaching. He says that the penalty of stoning is never specifically mentioned in the Qur'an, which is true. He points out that the penalty as prescribed in the Qur'an is one-hundred lashes.

[24.2] (As for) the fornicatress and the fornicator, flog each of them, (giving) a hundred stripes, and let not pity for them detain you in the matter of obedience to Allah, if you believe in Allah and the last day, and let a party of believers witness their chastisement.

The Islamic assertion is that the harsh penalty of stoning was only in place as per the Old Testament rules until the new and better way was revealed. The punishment of stoning was rescinded when this verse of the Qur'an was revealed. The Muslims would now have a new way of dealing with the problem of adultery. By Islamic doctrine the Qur'an supersede the previous teachings. This is regardless of whether the previous teaching was prescribed in the Torah or if retold in various Hadith. Once the new penalty of one-hundred lashes was revealed in the Qur'an, stoning would no longer be an option.

From the standpoint of a debate, one could never really know for sure whether any particular Hadith was recorded before or after the Qur'anic injunction. Besides, getting knee-deep into such esoteric aspects of Islamic doctrine is not how to win Muslims for Christ anyway. So even if I knew with certainty that a particular Hadith prescribing stoning was recorded after the Qur'an commanded lashes, it would be of little value for saving souls. Sure, it would show Islamic doctrine to be bankrupt, but such debate tactics are almost always fruitless and unprofitable.

However, what if we found that there was a Hadith where Muhammad discussed both penalties simultaneously? What if Muhammad was given a choice between

administering either stoning or lashes and he chose both? Just what would that say about what Muslims are really supposed to do after catching an adulterer? Remember, Muslims are supposed to follow Muhammad's example. So let's investigate further regarding what kinds of choices Muhammad made.

Consider this Hadith. In it, the option of one-hundred lashes is indeed given to the man, but the woman is still ordered to be stoned by Muhammad.

Narrated Abu Huraira and Zaid bin Khalid Al-Juhani: A bedouin came and said, "O Allah's Apostle! Judge between us according to Allah's Laws." His opponent got up and said, "He is right. Judge between us according to Allah's Laws." The bedouin said, "My son was a laborer working for this man, and he committed illegal sexual intercourse with his wife. The people told me that my son should be stoned to death; so, in lieu of that, I paid a ransom of one hundred sheep and a slave girl to save my son. Then I asked the learned scholars who said, "Your son has to be lashed one-hundred lashes and has to be exiled for one year." The Prophet said, "No doubt I will judge between you according to Allah's Laws. The slave-girl and the sheep are to go back to you, and your son will get a hundred lashes and one year exile." He then addressed somebody, "O Unais! go to the wife of this (man) and stone her to death" So, Unais went and stoned her to death. [\[ii\]](#)

Remember where this all started? The Muslims assertion was that stoning was only done because the penalty of one-hundred lashes hadn't been revealed yet! But in this Hadith, clearly it is seen that lashes as the consequence had been already specified. In fact, it was dictated as the punishment for the man. Muhammad considers the punishment, gives lashes to the man, but reverts to stoning for the woman.

So which is it? If this incident occurred before the Qur'anic verse for lashes was revealed, then why doesn't Muhammad follow the OT law of stoning? Why does he administer a different punishment for the man? Alternatively, if this Hadith occurs after the Qur'anic verse, then Muhammad disobeys the Qur'an by reverting to pre-Islamic rules. In other words, if the penalty is stoning, Muhammad disobeyed by giving the man lashes. If the penalty is lashes, Muhammad disobeyed by stoning the woman. Whichever way it is, Muhammad's character is plainly shown.

Again, this type of information doesn't win Muslims for Christ. However, in this more polemic article, I hope to have clearly explained and exposed the often confusing statements made by Muslims regarding Islamic teachings.

[i] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6wIeghb9rTA>

[ii]

http://www.searchtruth.com/book_display.php?book=49&translator=1&start=0&number=860#860

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=295>



32. The Evil Eye

Posted on [December 8, 2013](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

Many of the articles that I write for this blog are quite theological and abstract in nature. However, to truly understand people, both their actions as well as their beliefs must be taken into account. Often belief and practice don't align, whether people are Christian or Muslim. There are often discrepancies between doctrine and praxis, and these aren't unique to Islam. Nevertheless, to get a fuller understanding of the differences between Christianity and Islam, some less known Islamic practices should be investigated. Many Muslims adopt cultural and superstitious beliefs, some of which gain credibility from the Hadith.

One such superstition that impacts Muslim lives is the evil eye. In English, the term "evil eye" refers to an intense look of anger, but the term has an entirely different meaning in the Middle East. This article in no way discusses the English usage of the term, but rather the Islamic view of the idiom. The evil eye is defined as follows:

The fundamental concept of the evil eye is that precious persons or things are constantly vulnerable to hurt or destruction caused by other people's envy. Such envy or jealousy is projected through the eye. [\[i\]](#)

The Islamic concept of the evil eye is when anyone looks with covetousness or envy at someone else's property, family, or even the person himself. This envious look is viewed as causing direct harm to the object envied. Muslims fear its effects and protect themselves against it through a variety of amulets, talismans, and charms. The Internet is littered with questions by Muslims regarding how to ward off the evil

eye. [\[ii\]](#) In *The Unseen Face of Islam*, Bill Musk gives some examples of the effect. One Muslim told a story about how someone had enviously eyed their family's new cow, and it stopped giving milk from that day forward. Often, medical professionals who cannot make a diagnosis will blame someone's ailment on the evil eye.

The Qur'an does not talk about the evil eye specifically, but Muhammad does. Sahih Bukhari, book 71 is devoted to medicine. In it Muhammad is reported to have stated that the evil eye is a fact [\[iii\]](#) and he specifically diagnoses some problems as having originated from the evil eye. [\[iv\]](#) The bottom line is that many Muslims live with the idea that a covetous glare from someone else can impact their life, prosperity, or relationships negatively. For this reason, open declarations of envy are to be avoided.

On the surface this aversion to envy would seem in agreement with that of Christianity. In Islam, the Qur'an mentions coveting as a sin in chapter 4, verse 32. In the Bible, in [Exodus 20:17](#), God gives the command not to covet your neighbor's wife, your neighbor's property, nor anything that your neighbor has. So it would appear that the religions are similar, in that both would be advocating its adherents not to covet.

However, a deeper investigation reveals something less obvious. The Bible is full of warnings about covetousness, yet some churches rarely preach about it from the pulpit. The Bible is full of admonitions and explanations of the harmful nature of covetousness. Covetous actions have severe consequences, and one such example is in 2 Kings 5, where Elisha refuses a gift from Naaman, but Elisha's servant Gehazi chases after him to score economic gain. The consequences for Gehazi are swift and severe ([2 Kings 5:27](#)).

The New Testament is equally serious about guarding yourself against this attitude of covetousness. God teaches us throughout His Word that covetous people will not have any part in His eternal Kingdom ([Ephesians 5:5](#)). That's a very serious pronouncement. Coveting the world's treasure creates alienation from God. ([Matthew 6:24](#)). It is lumped in with some nasty other sins, including selfishness ([2 Timothy 3:2](#)). It can cause us to mock the truth of God's Word ([Luke 16:14](#)). It is wholly unprofitable ([Matthew 16:26](#)). It can cause us to miss divine appointments ([Luke 14:18](#)). It disqualifies us from positions of ministry ([1 Timothy 3:3](#)). In the end, covetousness is the same as idolatry ([Colossians 3:5](#)) and because of it, we are deserving of God's wrath ([Colossians 3:6](#)).

So how do Christianity and Islam compare when it comes to covetousness?

Remember, in Islam, one of the common practices is to guard oneself against the evil eye of others. The harm done by the evil eye is inflicted on the person whose property is being coveted. In the Bible, the consequences for such envy are inflicted on the one doing the coveting. In Islam, the harm occurs to the victim. In Christianity, the harm occurs to the wrongdoer.

Of course in Christianity, covetous behavior does cause collateral damage. In Islam, envy would also be considered a sin. Yet, when you look closely at how the practice of dealing with envy occurs, a marked difference appears. The Bible makes it clear that harm falls on the one with the evil eye; in Islam, Muslims guard themselves from the harm believed to be transferred from others who exhibit envious behavior. .

[i] Musk, Bill. The Unseen Face of Islam. Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books, 1989, p23.

[ii}

<http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/index.php?page=showfatwa&Option=FatwaId&Id=7151>

[iii]

http://www.searchtruth.com/book_display.php?book=71&translator=1&start=0&number=635#635

[iv]

http://www.searchtruth.com/book_display.php?book=71&translator=1&start=0&number=634#634

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=300>



33. The Complexity of the Trinity

Posted on [January 29, 2014](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

After approximately forty articles, perhaps I have been remiss in not writing about one of the most contentious doctrinal issues dividing Christianity and Islam, the Trinity. Muslims often mention that the word “Trinity” never appears in the Bible, and I had discussed that in a much [earlier article](#), but have not yet attacked this issue head on. It is long past time to do so.

In Islam, Allah is indivisible, and his oneness is upheld as paramount. This concept is straightforward and easy to grasp, that Allah has no partners, is indivisible, and is one. Of course the concept of the Trinity is flatly denied. There are a few verses in the Qur’an that directly refute the concept of the Trinity. Perhaps one of the best known is as follows:

[4.171] O followers of the Book! do not exceed the limits in your religion, and do not speak (lies) against Allah, but (speak) the truth; the Messiah, Isa son of Marium is only an apostle of Allah and His Word which He communicated to Marium and a spirit from Him; believe therefore in Allah and His apostles, and say not, Three. Desist, it is better for you; Allah is only one God; far be It from His glory that He should have a son, whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth is His, and Allah is sufficient for a Protector.

Of course, in Christianity, we believe God to be one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This idea of God as three-in-one seems baffling at first, but Jesus clearly taught about the nature of God in ways that astonished His listeners. The Jews were outraged at His words, because they knew exactly what Jesus meant when He referred to Himself as God’s own Son ([John 5:18](#)). Jesus responded in no uncertain terms that He and the Father were connected in a unique way that was much more integrated than His listeners could imagine ([John 5:19](#), [John 17:21](#)). Still other passages talk about the Holy Spirit as eternal ([Hebrews 9:14](#)), omnipresent, ([Psalm 139:7-8](#)), and communicating not on His own, but somehow being interconnected with the Father and Son in enigmatic ways as well ([John 16:13](#)). There are many other passages in the Bible illustrating the deity of the Spirit such as [Acts 5:3-4](#), and great treatises on the systematic theology of the Trinity are written elsewhere. Here we will take a more uncommon approach to the issue.

Is there a way to slice through these apologetic arguments? Indeed there is. Arguing over the concept of the Trinity is fruitless. While Christians believe in one and only one God, Muslims aren't convinced when the concept of His Triune nature surfaces. This shouldn't be surprising, since trying to comprehend the nature of God in a logical and systematic fashion by using human reasoning only is absurd. When Paul preached, he recognized that the mystery of God's saving work transcended mere human reasoning ([Galatians 1:11](#)). More to the point, the Bible clues us into the fact that understanding deep spiritual truths about who God is requires the Spirit of God ([1 Corinthians 2:14](#)).

“But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.”

Accepting the truth of the Triune nature of God without the indwelling of the Spirit is impossible. Yet as humans we feel we can present strictly logical methods to prove the case, and it will be accepted through rational means. It is imperative to get past this misconception. Christian theologians have spent two millennia trying to correctly and accurately explain how God can be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit simultaneously. Why would we expect a quick description or analogy to unveil the Triune nature of God to our Muslim friends unless the Holy Spirit is active and working?

Recently, when I visited a local mosque, I was asked about the Trinity. I was asked to consider the fact that in Islam God is very understandable. I was informed that Allah's nature and makeup are simple and straightforward to comprehend. I couldn't agree more.

In Islam, the description of Allah is easily grasped by basic logic alone. In Christianity, the description of God defies normal human explanation. In Islam, Allah's makeup is simple and makes sense to the human mind. In Christianity, God's makeup is complex and enigmatic, and it requires contemplation and spiritual wisdom to even fathom who He is. If God is a simple creature and thus easy to understand, then Islam has it right. If God is an incredibly complex entity and beyond normal human thought patterns, then Christianity has it right. Each one of us must ask himself what kind of God we worship.

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=326>



34. Divorce and Remarriage

Posted on [February 23, 2014](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

The more I learn about Islam, the more incongruities I find when compared with Christianity. Of course there are items in each religion that appear similar, but so too there are many places where stark areas of divergence emerge. One such area is in the issue of divorce and remarriage. In both Christianity and Islam, divorce is viewed as a terrible occurrence, yet one that is sometimes unfortunately unavoidable. In this sense, the religions seem to be similar. But upon deeper investigation, some bizarre differences become apparent.

When God gave the law to Israel, one issue that it dealt with was that of divorce. The religious leaders of Jesus' day were familiar with the letter of the law, but they seemed to miss the point entirely ([Matthew 19:7](#)). God hates divorce ([Malachi 2:16](#)), and Jesus was quick to inform them that divorce was a concession given because of the reality of the hard-hearted nature of humans, but that divorce was never God's desire ([Matthew 19:8](#)). This isn't surprising, as anyone who has been divorced or had parents who divorced knows the heartache that accompanies it.

But there are circumstances where divorce may be inevitable. Two such reasons cited are adultery ([Matthew 5:32](#)) and abandonment by an unbelieving spouse ([1 Corinthians 7:15](#)). In such cases, the victimized spouse has options. One option is to follow through with the divorce, while the other is to offer forgiveness and work toward subsequent reconciliation. This isn't always advantageous or even feasible, but the freedom to choose the option of reconciliation is always there until a remarriage occurs.

The first four verses from Deuteronomy 24 spell out the scenario in more detail. In essence, if a man divorces his wife, and she marries another man, and that second man also divorces her, the first man should not take her back as a wife. Such a statute protects the sanctity of the second marriage and it prevented women from being tossed around as property.

Regardless, the Bible teaches that reconciliation of broken marriages can happen at any point until a remarriage occurs. This fits with God's character, since God is all about reconciliation ([Romans 5:10](#), [2 Corinthians 5:18](#)). The entire Bible is about God finding a way to repair and reconstruct the broken relationship we have with Him ([Colossians 1:20](#)).

Back to the marriage scenario, once reconciliation does not occur, and a person gets remarried, that new relationship is given the same protection and standing as the first marriage, so much so that you cannot go back.

So what does Islam teach about divorce, remarriage, and reconciliation? The primary verse in the Qur'an that speaks to this is as follows:

[2.230] So if he divorces her she shall not be lawful to him afterwards until she marries another husband; then if he divorces her there is no blame on them both if they return to each other (by marriage), if they think that they can keep within the limits of Allah, and these are the limits of Allah which He makes clear for a people who know.

If a divorce is finalized according to Islamic customs, it is irrevocable and reconciliation is no longer an option. An irrevocable divorce can be accomplished by the man uttering the words "I divorce you!" three times over any period of time, whether spread out or consecutively. As this Islamic site notes,

The absolute majority of the scholars are of the opinion that if one pronounces three divorces to one's wife at one time, they will count as three and an irrevocable divorce will be established.[\[i\]](#)

There is one and only one way to get remarried. This can be done if the woman gets married to another man, and then gets divorced from the second marriage. Not only must this second marriage occur, but it must be consummated. Muhammad himself spoke to this in the Hadith.

Narrated 'Aisha:

The wife of Rifa'a Al-Qurazi came to Allah's Apostle and said, "O Allah's Apostle! Rifa'a divorced me irrevocably. After him I married 'Abdur-Rahman bin Az-Zubair Al-Qurazi who proved to be impotent." Allah's Apostle said to her, "Perhaps you

want to return to Rifa'a? Nay (you cannot return to Rifa'a) until you and 'Abdur-Rahman consummate your marriage." [ii]

Notice that this woman apparently wanted to go back to her first husband Rifa, but she could not do so until she and Abdur-Rahman consummated their marriage. This might be getting a little confusing, so perhaps a recap is in order.

In Christianity, a broken marriage is always open for reconciliation until a remarriage occurs. In Islam, a broken marriage is not open for reconciliation until after a remarriage occurs. In Christianity, a second marriage precludes a person from returning to their first spouse. In Islam, a second marriage is required and must be consummated so that a person would have the option to return to their first spouse.

Everything is completely reversed.

[i] <http://www.islamhelpline.net/qa/divorce-three-talaq>

[ii] <http://www.usc.edu/org/cmje/religious-texts/hadith/bukhari/063-sbt.php#007.063.186>

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=337>



35. Love for the Prophet of Islam

Posted on [March 29, 2014](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

For Islam, Muhammad is considered the seal of the prophets, thus the last and greatest prophet. In Christianity, Jesus is the center and fulfillment of God's redemptive work. In both religions, mention of these corresponding names evokes the strongest emotions. Both Muslims and Christians can feel hurt when these respective figures are mocked or insulted. From a casual perspective, this would appear to be a reason why both religions are similar. So let's delve into this topic more thoroughly to find out whether there is something deeper showing how these religions are actually inverted from each other.

Within Islam, Muhammad is considered worthy of great praise. Muslims will adamantly tell you they do not worship Muhammad, and this topic was addressed in an earlier four part series. ([1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#)) Regardless, Muslims have a deep love and respect for Muhammad, and indeed this is a commandment given to them from the Qur'an itself. In fact, this verse puts Muhammad as a priority over even those in a person's own family. The Qur'an teaches that if a close relative opposes Muhammad, Muslims should no longer befriend them in any way.

[58:22] You shall not find a people who believe in Allah and the latter day befriending those who act in opposition to Allah and His Apostle, even though they were their (own) fathers, or their sons, or their brothers, or their kinsfolk;

In this verse, Muslims are instructed to not make friends with someone who is in opposition to Allah or Muhammad, even if that person is a parent or sibling. In other words, if your mother criticizes either Allah or Muhammad, you should not stay on good terms. Love for Muhammad should supersede the family attachment.

This deep love for Muhammad above even close relatives pervades Islamic teachings. As one Islamic blogger writes, "For us Muslims, the Beloved peace be upon him is more dear than our parents, our spouses, our children, and even ourselves."^[i] This type of attitude shouldn't be surprising, as the Hadith report Muhammad himself commanding this as a precondition for faith.

Narrated Anas: The Prophet said "None of you will have faith till he loves me more than his father, his children and all mankind."

So how does this command by Muhammad compare with the teachings of Jesus? It isn't quite the same, but Jesus did say something regarding putting Him as the ultimate priority in [Matthew 10:37](#).

He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.

Similarly, in [Matthew 19:29](#), Jesus informs his followers that they may need to cut ties with parents or children in order to effectively follow him, and that they will be rewarded for doing so. However, this teaching within Christianity doesn't quite line up with Islamic teaching. Jesus does make it clear that care of parents should not be abandoned for showy religious reasons ([Matthew 15:5-6](#)). He also makes sure His

own human mother would be cared for after His death ([John 19:27](#)). But these small differences miss the much larger point.

The main difference here isn't how we treat our parents relative to the central religious figure. At issue is to whom does such devotion belong? By this question I don't mean Muhammad or Jesus. Rather, the question is posed in a much more abstract and philosophical sense. Is any man, whether prophet or not, worthy of such dedication and prioritization? Should any religious figure be loved even more than one's own family? This question, though purely philosophical in nature, must be asked.

Is any mere human deserving of this kind of love, that one would abandon their own family members in order to follow their directives? In Islam, the answer is clearly "yes." Muhammad is given this role, this devotion, this prioritization. Countless articles and Hadith extol his great qualities, but that isn't the point. The point is that no matter how excellently any human might be portrayed, are they worthy of full obedience? In Christianity, the answer is clearly "no." While Jesus commanded this type of devotion and love from His followers, He didn't do so as a mere human. As God in the flesh, the Christian devotion to Jesus is not a supreme love for another human. Perhaps better stated, it is not a supreme love for a mere human only, since Jesus was both all man and all God.

Only God is worthy of being loved to the extent that we would even consider parting from our family members. In Christianity, when Jesus commands this toward Himself, He does so with divine authority. In Islam, when Muhammad does this, he does so as a human only. The difference is stark. Islam elevates a mere man to the pinnacle of earthly devotion, while Christianity reserves such adoration for God alone.

[i] <http://mohamedghilan.com/2012/02/13/why-are-muslims-so-serious-about-their-prophet/>

[ii]

http://www.searchtruth.com/book_display.php?book=2&translator=1&start=0&number=14#14

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=348>



36. Save Yourself

Posted on [April 14, 2014](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

During this time of Easter celebration, I wanted to take a break from discussing specific theological inversions between Christianity and Islam. Instead, I wish to focus more on a certain pattern or errant thought. While Muslims often slip into this diabolical way of thinking, so too do atheists, agnostics, and indeed many Christians as well.

The issue at hand is how truth is often used to deceive. Yes, truth. The devil often uses truth to deceive us. If that statement sounds surprising and perhaps heretical, hang on a moment. Consider the devil's words in the Garden of Eden ([Genesis 3:5](#)). He tells Eve that if she eats of the forbidden fruit, her eyes will be opened and she will know good and evil. Consider the truthfulness of that statement. It's dead on accurate. However, there is some information left out, and the information withheld is the consequences of the action. But the actual statement on its face is true.

So too, in the wilderness, the devil tempts Jesus by stating truth. He says in [Matthew 4:3](#) that if Jesus is the Son of God, he should command stones to become bread to prove it. So is Jesus the Son of God? Yes, that statement is true. Does Jesus have the power to turn stones to bread? Yes, Jesus has the supernatural power to do that as well. Just as in Genesis, the challenge offered by the devil contains a lot of truth, yet there is something off in a very sinister way. That something is that there is more to the question than meets the eye. The information being left out is that Jesus performs miracles all the time, but they are always done for the [sake of others](#), and never for Himself. By posing the question the way he did, the devil allows the doubting and uneducated reader to view Jesus' lack of action as a denial of deity rather than a confirmation of His sinless nature.

What's happening in these instances is that partial truth is being spoken. Partial truth can be very dangerous. Omission of details, consequences, or collateral information results in an incorrect impression. Partial truth opens the door to wrong decisions made out of ignorance, and yet actions based on those decisions often seem justified.

This pattern of errant thought is also seen clearly in the disbelievers' reactions as Jesus hung on the cross. Their argument proceeds as follows from [Matthew 27:42](#),

“He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him.”

In other words, the faulty reasoning concludes that if Jesus was really the Son of God, He could descend from the instrument of certain death using miraculous power, thus proving His identity once for all. When He does not, it opens the door of doubt for those who misguidedly expect this to be the wise and godly course of action. But of course there is much more happening here. Jesus' death on the cross is the mechanism by which God saves us from our sins. Jesus became sin for us, and so it is Jesus' death that satisfies God's wrath for sin and then Jesus' subsequent resurrection which proves Jesus is who He says and that we too will share in this resurrection. As Warren Wearsbe said, “In reality, it was the fact he stayed on the cross that proved His divine Sonship.” [\[i\]](#)

It's so easy though to miss the big picture. Arguing from isolated facts is a surefire way to create a confrontational air as well as to come to improper logical conclusions. While I have heard Muslims argue the specific point above, it is rare. This is likely because doing so tacitly admits that Jesus was crucified, which is an avenue Muslims do not wish to travel down. However, this example and many others like it illustrate a common fallacy of argumentation style. Launching into facts while ignoring foundational issues often results in completely reversing the logical outcome.

While Jesus does have the power to save Himself from the cross, in another very real sense, He does not do so because it would result in all of humanity being left to die in their own sin. It would mean disobedience to the Father, and it would leave Scripture unfulfilled ([Luke 24:44](#)). The correct conclusion is that because Jesus does not exercise supernatural power to remove Himself from the cross, it proves that He did indeed go to the cross of His own accord ([John 10:17-18](#)).

This Easter season, let us remember that Jesus had the power to save Himself the entire time, but in the face of intense mockery, He stays on the cross to accomplish the greatest of all purposes.

[i] *The Passion*. (2004). Brentwood TN: Integrity Publishers, p245.

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=352>



37. The Second Pledge of ‘Aqaba

Posted on May 19, 2014 by Robert Sievers

One topic I tend to avoid on this blog is that of jihad. There are plenty of well qualified and adept authors who catalog political movements within Islam. God has called me to keep a more theological focus. Yet the issue of jihad within Islam, while certainly incentivized by political movements or oppression, derives from a more fundamental theological foundation. It is within this context that I discuss this controversial issue. Specifically, to better understand jihad within Islam and the differences between Islam and Christianity, this article will examine the second pledge of ‘Aqaba.

On a broader note, grasping the history of Islam is essential if a person wants to understand Islam itself. So much of Islamic theology ties back to the actions of Muhammad. Yet the stories of Muhammad’s life as contained within the Hadith are fragmented. Consequently, it is often difficult to get an overarching view of the history of Muhammad’s life rather than bits and pieces of the puzzle that prohibit the entire scene from coming into focus.

With that in mind, today’s blog article is about the second pledge of ‘Aqaba. To provide context, Muhammad was still in Mecca and persecution of the fledgling Muslim community was on the increase. Because of this, many of the early Muslims had already fled to Medina where they were being welcomed. Muhammad was also preparing for an impending departure from Mecca, but his life was in danger from his opponents and his escape would require some clever maneuvering. At the minimum, he would need some followers to provide cover and possibly a much higher level of commitment. While many Muslims had pledged their loyalty to Muhammad at ‘Aqaba the previous year, Muhammad extended that first pledge to include his protection should fighting erupt. [\[i\]](#) As ibn Ishaq reports in his well respected work “Life of Muhammad”,

“When God gave permission to his apostle to fight, the second ‘Aqaba contained conditions involving war which were not in the first act of fealty. Now they bound themselves to war against all and sundry for God and his apostle, while he promised them for faithful service thus the reward of paradise. [\[ii\]](#)

The apostle had not been given permission to fight or allowed to shed blood before the second ‘Aqaba. [\[iii\]](#)

This second pledge of ‘Aqaba introduced the concept of jihad, consequently giving the prophet of Islam the confidence and resources to escape Mecca for Medina. This flight is known as the hijra, and it is the foundational moment of Islamic history. (See unravelingislam’s [inaugural article](#) for more info.) The hijra was the pivotal moment in Islam and it occurred soon after this second pledge of ‘Aqaba, and so these two events are highly interrelated.

How does all this relate to Christianity? To find the analogous event, we need to backtrack to what happened just prior to the pivotal moment in Christian history, and note the contrasts. Of course the pinnacle events in the life of Jesus are the crucifixion ([Romans 5:6](#)) and the resurrection ([Acts 17:31](#)). As we move backwards from this climactic moment, we find an analogous moment for Jesus’ disciples. Just as Muhammad’s followers are forced to decide whether to pledge their lives for the prophet of Islam, so too Jesus’ disciples are put in a corresponding position. The mob had come to arrest Jesus, and the time to defend Him from physical harm had arrived. [Luke 22:49-51](#) gives the details,

49 When those who were around Him saw what was going to happen, they said, “Lord, shall we strike with the sword?” 50 And one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. 51 But Jesus answered and said, Stop! No more of this.” And He touched his ear and healed him.

The disciples were ready to fight for Jesus. In fact one did so even before waiting for the answer to the question of whether or not they should fight! Yet Jesus turns everything upside down. He doesn’t ask His followers to fight for His safety. He tells them to stop and lay down their arms. Jesus makes it clear that loyalty toward Him means something very different from fighting to defend His physical safety because He is a different kind of king ([John 18:36](#)).

Both Christianity and Islam have a defining event. In each religion, the followers have a chance to show their loyalty just before that event. In Islam, that loyalty is shown by agreeing to fight to protect Muhammad at the second pledge of 'Aqaba. In Christianity, that loyalty is shown by putting down swords and agreeing not to fight in the garden of Gethsemane.

[i] http://www.musalla.org/articles/The_pledges_at_Aqabah41.html

[ii] Ishaq, M. i. (1955). *Sirat Rasul Allah*. (A. Guillaume, Trans.) Karachi: Oxford University Press, p208.

[iii] *ibid*, p 212

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=361>



38. The Use of Parables

Posted on June 22, 2014 by Robert Sievers

Throughout the Bible, Jesus often taught through parables ([Matthew 13:10](#)) in order to impart spiritual truth to His followers. Muslims also talk about the parables in the Qur'an. So it seems we have yet another reason to view Islam and Christianity as comparable. Of course, with a little investigation, we will find just the opposite to be true.

Are the use of parables in the Bible and Qur'an analogous, or are they completely dissimilar? To answer this question, great care must be taken to understand what a parable actually is. Just what defines a parable, and what does not? Some items in the Bible that are casually referred to as parables are better described as similitudes or metaphors. For example, when the kingdom of heaven is compared to leaven in the flour, ([Matthew 13:33](#)), linguistically this comparison is a straight similitude. Unlike a simile, which compares two unlike things, a similitude examines how something has a counterpart, a match, or how two like items resemble each other. Some teachings of Jesus are metaphors, figures of speech where a characteristic is

applied to something that it is not directly applicable to. One such case is when Jesus says that Christians are “the salt of the earth” ([Matthew 5:13](#)).

Such statements are not parables in the fullest sense of the word. They are only comparisons on the level of similitudes or metaphors. There is nothing wrong with similes, similitudes, or metaphors. They certainly have their place in religious instruction. The Bible has many, and the Qur’an does as well. Here are two such examples from the Qur’an where the translator uses the term “parable” rather than “similitude”,

[22.73] O people! A parable is presented, so listen to it: Those you invoke besides God will never create a fly, even if they banded together for that purpose. And if the fly steals anything from them, they cannot recover it from it. Weak are the pursuer and the pursued.

[29.41] The parable of those who take guardians besides Allah is as the parable of the spider that makes for itself a house; and most surely the frailest of the houses is the spider’s house did they but know.

These and all other such verses from the Qur’an show examples of similitudes and metaphors, but not parables. So exactly what is a parable? A true parable is a story which evokes a response from the hearer. The true parable has a plot which develops into a climax, often with a surprising twist. Just like a joke, it has a “gotcha” at the end that often catches the listener off-guard. And just like a joke, when you stop to explain the joke, it loses its punch. The impact only occurs when you hear it with fresh ears.

For example, consider the parable of the landowner and evil farmers which begins in [Matthew 21:33](#). In the presence of the Pharisees, Jesus recounts this hypothetical encounter about a landowner renting a vineyard to some tenant farmers. He sends some emissaries to collect the rent at harvest, but the renters injure and even kill people from the group. The storyline continues to develop ([Matthew 21:36](#)). It climaxes as the owner sends his own son, whom he presumes the renters will surely respect, ([Matthew 21:37](#)) but he is killed also ([Matthew 21:38](#)). Jesus asks the Pharisees what will happen to the evil famers, and they respond that the farmers will meet with the justice they deserve. But now comes the punchline. Jesus quotes the Old Testament ([Matthew 21:42](#)), and suddenly the Pharisees realize they are the butt of this “joke.”

45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they understood that He was speaking about them.

The parable hits home on a completely new level. It sneaks up behind the listeners and surprises and astounds them. More than a straight comparison, instead it's a full story with a developed plotline that catches the hearers unaware and strikes home with a heightened level of intensity.

Jesus taught using many other parables, and they challenge both the hearers of both His day and ours to higher levels of understanding and response. However, when Muslims speak of the parables in the Qur'an, they are only referring to similitudes and metaphors. The Qur'an has nothing comparable to the parable of the Good Samaritan, the seeds and the sower, or the prodigal son. The so-called parables of the Qur'an, as exemplified above, just quickly compare two items and then ask the reader to consider the likeness of those items.

Both the Bible and Qur'an use the word "parable" to describe some of their teachings. Yet the two books couldn't be more different. Jesus teaches using hypothetical stories with plotlines that deliver a punch at the end. The Qur'an just contains similitudes and metaphors. The two corresponding holy books are completely different in this regard.

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=369>



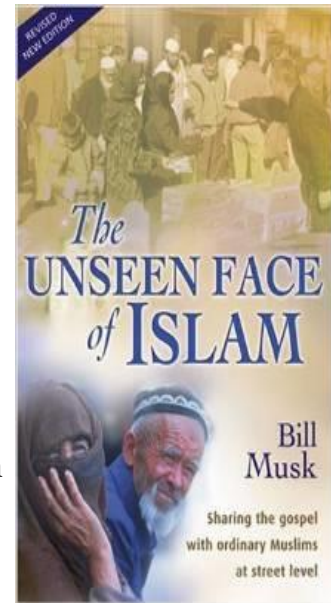
39. The Unseen Face of Islam

Posted on July 28, 2014 by Robert Sievers

There are many people who study Islam. Some, like myself, focus on theological differences. However, one of the things I have learned is that the use of apologetic tools to prove the rationality of Jesus' claims is hardly ever effective. That doesn't mean such apologetic efforts should be discarded. Rather, it means we should be looking for additional tools when introducing Muslims to Jesus Christ. It has been observed that often power encounters rather than truth encounters help reveal God's

true nature within the Muslim community. It is within this context I recommend “The Unseen Face of Islam” by Bill Musk. The book goes much broader than theology, discussing those area of life, superstition, and tradition that are often forefront in the mind of a Muslim and thus more meaningful than intellectual arguments.

The book was written almost 25 years ago, but “The Unseen Face of Islam” is a very unique book in the way it approaches Muslims and the religion of Islam. I have read many books on Islam. There are countless volumes of books describing the tenets of Islamic doctrine. There are still bushels more that take an apologetic or polemic tone directed toward those tenets. Still others take a more scholarly and even-handed view of the Qur’an or the Hadith literature. Musk takes an approach I haven’t seen anywhere else. He examines the everyday life of Muslims, and how their practices differ from those official doctrines that Islam lays out. Most importantly, he connects the fact that a scholarly approach to Islam in general by Christians does not address the folklore, spiritism, and demonic powers that often come in to play in the daily life of most Muslims.



The author starts the book by covering a variety of topics having to do with superstition and religious rituals. Such topics as the evil eye, talismans, jinn, and festivals are discussed from the standpoint of individual accounts as well as patterns of behavior. Such traditions are sometimes based on obscure teachings of the Qur’an, but often they come out of societal habits that go back centuries before Islam itself. The reality is that these rituals provide deep meaning and cultural cohesion. To minister to Muslims, Christians must understand the embedded nature of these traditions and practices. Muslims look to them in order to have guidance, obtain healing, and seek protection from evil spirits.

This brings Musk to the main point of the book. Any purely academic approach to Islam will fail to meet the Muslim in the world in which he lives. Truth is a concept that Westerners value highly, and so we should. However, in Middle Eastern cultures, issues such as family ties, religious festivals, and supernatural entities take a more prominent role. Any attempt to evangelize Muslims must take these issues into account. Truth must be accompanied by power. Jesus is the great physician as well as the way, the truth, and the life. Jesus has power to cast out demons, to heal

our infirmities, to answer prayers, and to meet us in our times of need. Jesus Himself made reference to the fact that belief in Him would often come by recognizing His miraculous power first, leading to the realization of who He is ([John 5:36](#), [John 14:11](#)). His miraculous power is just as prevalent today as it was when He walked the earth.

Jesus' abilities meet us no matter what our issue, but especially when we are being oppressed by spiritual forces. In the West, we tend to discount such powers as real and present, while the Biblical accounts tell a different story. Musk does a great job of breaking us out of our Western way of thinking in order that Muslims may be reached for Christ by not just the truth of His Word, but by the power of His presence as well.

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=382>



40. Where are you going?

Posted on [August 26, 2014](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

In today's world, it is much easier than in years past to navigate your way to an unknown address. The advent of GPS devices and Google maps has changed how we find our way around. Back in the day, receiving accurate directions was tricky business. Before modern navigation systems, the preferable method of getting to an unknown destination was to follow someone else who knew where they were going.

How does this relate to Christianity and Islam? As it happens, both Muhammad and Jesus had something to say about where they were going after they died. During the final week of Jesus' life, He relayed a lot of instructions and encouragement to His disciples. In particular, He wanted to assure them that while He was leaving them physically, He had a purpose behind His departure and that He would be awaiting them. Jesus told the disciples that He was going to make preparations for their eventual arrival in heaven.

2 In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 If I go and prepare a place for you, I

will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also
([John 14:2-3](#))

Jesus was informing the disciples that He was going ahead of them to heaven to get things ready, but that they too would be there with Him at some point in the future. This level of certainty about where we go after death is an entirely different topic and will be discussed in a future article ([Ephesians 1:13-14](#)). For now, let's stay focused just on the fact that Jesus announced that He Himself was going to be with the Father and to prepare a place for His followers. Jesus knew where He was going, and what He would be doing when He arrived there.

What did Muhammad say about his final destination after death? A person might assume that Muhammad would have said he would be with Allah after he died, but this is not the case. In one of the Hadith, one of the early Muslims was discussing whether her father would reside in heaven or Hell. Muhammad clearly stated that nobody could be certain of anyone's final destination, even that of himself. Muhammad stated that "By Allah, though I am the Apostle of Allah, yet I do not know what Allah will do to me," [\[i\]](#) This Hadith is quite reliable since it is attested to by multiple chains of narration. Since this statement has been corroborated by so many early Muslims, it subsequently occurs in multiple other Hadith as well. [\[ii\]](#)

This contrast is so stark that it cannot be ignored. Jesus clearly knew where He was headed after His physical death. Muhammad was uncertain. As for myself, if I want to get somewhere, it seems obvious that I want to follow someone who knows where they are going rather than someone who isn't clear on how to get there either. In Jerry Trousdale's book "Miraculous Movements," he shares the story of one Muslim who contemplates this very same thought. The speaker was talking to his grandfather about some of the Hadith mentioned earlier, and the conversation picks up as follows,

I ran to my grandfather and said, "What did Mohammad say when he was dying?" And he repeated these things to me. I said, "Grandfather, look at Jesus. He said he was going to his Father and he would prepare a place for his followers, and after that he will come back. But Mohammad doesn't know where he is going, so which one would you follow?" And he said, "The one that knows where he is going." And I said, "I am going to a church." And that's how I came to know the Lord. [\[iii\]](#)

Where are you going? Perhaps the better question is how will you get there? Will you follow someone who knows the way, or someone who isn't sure where he will wind up?

[i] Sahih Bukhari, Volume 5, Book 58, Number 266. http://www.sahih-bukhari.com/Pages/Bukhari_5_58.php

[ii] Sahih Bukhari, Volume 9, Book 87, Number 131. http://www.sahih-bukhari.com/Pages/Bukhari_9_87.php

[iii] Trousdale, Jerry. Miraculous Movements. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012, p79.

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=394>



41. Friendship between Christians and Muslims

Posted on [September 8, 2014](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

Over the years, I have been blessed to be friends with many Muslims. Many people believe that more and stronger interfaith friendships will increase understanding, and I wholeheartedly agree this is necessary. By creating these interfaith friendships, Christians will let go of misconceptions about Islam, and Muslims will similarly let go of misconceptions regarding Christianity. But as the discussion of such interfaith friendships takes form, is there something more subtle that illustrates a strict dichotomy between the two religions and how they each view and approach such interaction?

To begin with, what is the view within Islam regarding taking Christians as friends? As many people know, the Qur'an forbids Muslims from becoming friends with anyone who would be counted as an unbeliever as well as those "who received the Scripture before" the Muslim. From the Muslim point of view, this would be Christians.

[5.56] O Ye who believe! Choose not for friend such of those who received the Scripture before you, and of the disbelievers, as make a jest and sport of your religion. But keep your duty to Allah if ye are true believers.

Some other translations of this verse of the Qur'an use the word "guardian" or "ally". However, the meaning is clear. As respected early Muslim ibn Kathir states in his tafsir, "This Ayah discourages and forbids taking the enemies of Islam and its people, such as the People of the Book and the polytheists, as friends."^[i] Luckily, friendship is not something that begins at a distinct moment. Friendships develop over time. If you think about a current friend, it is difficult to pinpoint the exact time and place where that person changed from being an acquaintance into a friend. The friendship occurs before either party would cognitively acknowledge its inception. This fact oftentimes allows Christians to develop deep friendships with Muslims even though this is prohibited within Islam.

Though Muslims are warned against taking Christians as friends, Muslims do state they respect the previous prophets and the teachings that they brought. While there is a good argument against whether Muslims actually respect other religions, most Muslims will tell you that they do. The Qur'an even makes a point to note that Muslims are to respect previous prophets. In essence, Muslims are told to believe in Jesus and what He revealed.

[2:136] Say (O Muslims): We believe in Allah and that which is revealed unto us and that which was revealed unto Abraham, and Ishmael, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the tribes, and that which Moses and Jesus received, and that which the prophets received from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and unto Him we have surrendered.

In short, Muslims are to respect Christianity but not take Christians as friends. Jesus teaches us to have a different attitude with respect to how to interact with others, including those who follow other religions. Christians are told we are to love each other ([John 13:34](#); [1 John 3:11](#)). This command is not just for other Christians, but even for our enemies. We are told to love others to the extent even to pray for those who persecute us ([Matthew 5:44](#)). Loving your neighbor as yourself is foundational to Jesus' teachings on how we are to operate on a daily basis ([Mark 12:31](#)). Yet at the same time, as Christians we are to hate the sin that so easily entraps those around us ([Romans 12:9](#), [Amos 5:15](#)). Jesus lived out this principle as he spent time with sinners, while simultaneously working to guide them to repentance ([Mark 2:16-17](#)). When asked about the woman caught in adultery, Jesus makes sure she doesn't get stoned, but then at the end tells her to change her ways ([John 8:11](#)). Many people have summarized this Biblical principle as "love the sinner, hate the sin." As one Christian writer states, "I can love the liar while hating his lies. I can love the

alcoholic while hating his alcoholism. I can love the adulterer while hating his adultery.”^[ii]

So what does this have to do with Islam? The same principle applies. As Christians, we are to love Muslims, sincerely and deeply. Yet under no circumstances can we respect and admire a false gospel ([Galatians 1:8](#)).

All this preparation though is to illustrate an odd contrast between Islam and Christianity. Islam teaches its adherents to view Christianity with respect, but not to take Christians as friends. Christianity teaches its adherents not to view Islam with respect, but to take Muslims as friends and love them with a pure heart. Islam respects the other religion, but not the followers; Christianity doesn't respect the other religion, but demands love for its followers.

You could not create more contrasting and anti-parallel teachings regarding how to treat other religions and those who practice them.

[i]

http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=765&Itemid=60

[ii] <http://www.plainsimplefaith.com/2013/06/the-bible-doesnt-say-love-the-sinner-hate-the-sin-the-defense-series/>

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=401>



42. Forgiveness

Posted on [October 13, 2014](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

Within both Christianity and Islam, a great deal of attention is paid to the issue of forgiveness. Both Muhammad and Jesus talked about forgiveness extensively. Because of this, many people assume that Christianity and Islam are quite similar. A cursory examination may lead to erroneous conclusions that only minor details vary between the two respective stances on forgiveness. However, a closer look at how

Jesus and Muhammad approached the subject of forgiveness reveals some insightful and profound differences.

Forgiveness in Islam is a subject that occurs often in both the Qur'an as well as the Hadith. As an example, The Qur'an states,

[47:19] So know, [O Muhammad], that there is no deity except Allah and ask forgiveness for your sin and for the believing men and believing women. And Allah knows of your movement and your resting place.

In this verse, Muhammad and his followers are told about the exclusivity of Allah as God, and that they should be asking for forgiveness. Yet something is happening here that may not be immediately evident. Not only are Muslims commanded to ask for forgiveness, but Muhammad himself is included in that directive. Many modern Muslim apologists explain this away claiming that Muhammad did not sin, and thus was not required to seek forgiveness in the same way as other Muslims. However, the Hadith tell a different story. Perhaps it is best to draw our own conclusions by letting Muhammad's own words speak for themselves. In his private life, Muhammad sought forgiveness, and his actions are recorded in countless Hadith, of which I have provided two as examples.

O Allah! Forgive me my sins that I did in the past or will do in the future, and also the sins I did in secret or in public. [\[i\]](#)

O my Lord, forgive me, and accept my repentance [\[ii\]](#)

As mentioned earlier, Muslims contend that Muhammad asked for forgiveness as an example to other Muslims only, and that he himself did not sin in such a manner that required him to actually need this forgiveness. While I strongly disagree with the logic that Muslims use to justify such arguments, something bigger is going on here so I choose to bypass this point of contention in order to arrive at a deeper truth. Regardless of whether he needed to or not, Muhammad definitely asked for forgiveness.

How does this compare to Jesus? As it happens, the Bible does clearly state that Jesus was sinless ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#), [Hebrews 4:15](#)). This is a foundational aspect of Christianity. If Jesus hadn't led a sinless life, how could He have been the perfect

sacrifice ([Hebrews 9:14](#))? If He wasn't the perfect sacrifice, how could He have paid for our sins ([Hebrews 10:11-12](#))?

Since Jesus was sinless, ([1 Peter 2:22](#), [1 John 3:5](#)) He did not need to ask forgiveness. Not once did he ever do so even for show. Jesus never prayed for forgiveness, not even to serve as an example for the disciples. He did instruct the disciples on prayer, ([Matthew 6:9](#)) which included asking for forgiveness, but Jesus Himself never prayed that way.

Instead, when dealing with the issue of forgiveness, Jesus does something quite different. When four men daringly lowered a paralytic down to Him in the midst of a crowded room, Jesus told him that "his sins are forgiven" ([Mark 2:5](#)). Such a statement evoked a strong yet proper response from the religious leaders of the day. They considered this action blasphemous, and rightfully so ([Mark 2:7](#)). Jesus continues by healing the paralytic. He then asks which is easier, to supernaturally heal a person, or to forgive their sins. Of course both are humanly impossible. Thus the question is posed as a means to show that Jesus' statements regarding forgiveness of sins carries full weight and authority ([Mark 2:10-11](#)). Rather than seeking forgiveness for sin, Jesus went around granting forgiveness to others. He even prayed for forgiveness for the very people who hung him on the cross ([Luke 23:34](#)). Since God alone has authority to forgive sin, this is yet another demonstration and validation of who Jesus is.

This disparity couldn't be more striking. Both Muhammad and Jesus speak of forgiveness, but they do so in exactly opposite ways. Muhammad prays to Allah to forgive him. Jesus bestows forgiveness on others. Which one do you want to put your trust in?

[i] Sahih Bukhari, Volume 9, Book 93, Number 482 http://www.sahih-bukhari.com/Pages/Bukhari_9_93.php

[ii] Jami` at-Tirmidhi Vol. 6, Book 45, Hadith 3433 <http://sunnah.com/tirmidhi/48>

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=405>



43. The Acquisition of Knowledge

Posted on [November 27, 2014](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

As many readers of this blog know, I recently graduated from Urbana Theological Seminary with a Masters in Religion with an emphasis in Islamic history and theology. Returning to school after a twenty year hiatus wasn't easy. Yet it was important for me to gain a fuller comprehension of all aspects of religious history, thought, theology, and apologetics. Obtaining knowledge and developing the wisdom that derives from it is an aspiration that many people from different faiths share. But what happens when we look at the theological instructions regarding acquisition of knowledge that is given within Christianity and Islam?

In the Bible, it shouldn't be surprising that God tells us to seek knowledge and understanding. In fact, the entire book of Proverbs is given to teach us how valuable knowledge and wisdom are, how they affect our lives, and how to employ them in our daily lives. They are so valuable, God tells us that they are to be sought more than silver and gold ([Proverbs 8:10](#); [Proverbs 16:16](#)). We are blessed when we obtain them ([Proverbs 3:13](#)). Indeed, it guards our very lives ([Proverbs 10:21](#)). It allows us to more fully comprehend the mystery of God that is revealed in Christ ([Colossians 2:2-3](#)). If we lack wisdom, we can ask God Himself, who is pleased to grant it to us with abundance and without reproach ([James 1:5](#)).

Perhaps the Biblical account which most reveals God's view of wisdom and the human need to acquire it is that of King Solomon. Very early in his reign, God tells Solomon to ask anything he wants from Him ([1 Kings 3:5](#)). Solomon chooses to request a wise and discerning heart in order that he could be a wise and just ruler ([1 Kings 3:9](#)). God was very pleased by this request ([1 Kings 3:10](#)), so much so He granted Solomon a number of other things as well ([1 Kings 3:13](#)). Because Solomon put first things first, God was pleased to reward him in excess of what he had asked.

Other Biblical characters asked for wisdom, but in a much more confrontational way. How far can this idea of asking God for wisdom be pushed? In the book of Job, Job is stricken with calamity and longs to know why. He confronts God in an effort to find out what is going on ([Job 7:20](#)). Even though Job knows God's power and justice are perfect, still Job demands an answer from God Himself ([Job 10:1-2](#); [Job 13:3](#)). While God does not explain the inner workings of why calamity often strikes the seemingly undeserving, God never once rebukes Job for asking the difficult questions.

The Qur'an offers a somewhat different perspective on asking such difficult questions.

[5.101-102] O you who believe! do not put questions about things which if declared to you may trouble you, and if you question about them when the Quran is being revealed, they shall be declared to you; Allah pardons this, and Allah is Forgiving, Forbearing. A people before you indeed asked such questions, and then became disbelievers on account of them.

In this verse, Muslims are specifically told NOT to ask hard questions because the knowledge that they receive in return may do more harm than good. In other words, the pursuit of knowledge within Islam has limits. Any question that is not well defined or is in any way “outside the box” is frowned upon.

It is paramount to make sure this ayah is not taken out of context. Is this really what this section of the Qur'an means? To ensure this is the correct interpretation, consider what ibn Kathir, one of the most prominent early Qur'an commentators had to say regarding these verses of the Qur'an,

The apparent wording of this Ayah indicates that we are forbidden to ask about things that if one has knowledge of, he would be sorry he had asked. Consequently, it is better to avoid such questions. [\[i\]](#)

Some Muslims herald Islam's commands to pursue knowledge, but the Qur'an and Hadith give a mixed message at best. While knowledge is applauded in some Hadith, others make it clear that this refers to religious knowledge only. Even that knowledge which is to be pursued is restricted to memorization of the Qur'an and understanding of well-defined Islamic principles. Asking the hard questions is strictly prohibited.

To review, on the surface both Christianity and Islam suggest that acquiring knowledge is a lofty goal. However, a closer look shows that the God of the Bible tells us to pursue knowledge at all costs, to ask Him to give us all knowledge and wisdom. In Islam, the acquisition of knowledge is only limited to well-understood religious dogma. Any investigation that strays from the norm is disparaged. No matter where you look, Christianity and Islam approach topics from completely different perspectives.

[i]

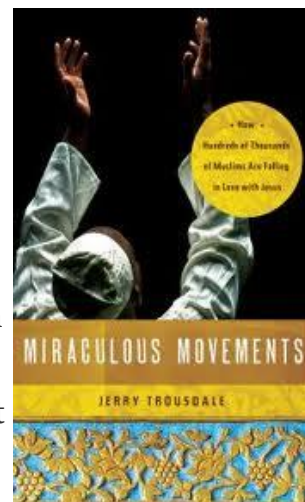
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Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=418>

44. Christian Movements Within Islam

Posted on December 19, 2014 by Robert Sievers

As we approach the end of the year, I wanted to leave everyone with an encouraging note. Christianity and Islam are intersecting in ways they never have before. The advent of the Internet and the prolific nature of the ease of worldwide travel have caused each religion to face completely new and unforeseen challenges. These and other factors have resulted in unprecedented occurrences throughout the religious landscape of our world. One such occurrence is that Muslims in every part of the world are turning to Jesus Christ in record numbers. I have recently read two very similar books which document these movements.



The first book is entitled *Miraculous Movements* by Jerry Trousdale. Trousdale is the Director of International Ministries for [CityTeam](#). The book presents a tested and successful style of ministry that Christians are using to reach Muslims. While many Westerners may find the techniques odd, they are well-grounded and Biblical. The main focus of the book is to show the pattern and results of disciple making movements. This goes way beyond trying to reach people in order to bring them to salvation. Disciple making movements change the focus from salvation to making disciples. The idea is that one of the goals of true disciples of Jesus is to make other disciples. When disciples make other disciples, who make other disciples, exponential math takes over ([2 Timothy 2:2](#)). Just like compound interest starts earning the investor interest on interest, so too disciple making movements results in entire groups of people coming to Christ and spreading the good news to others that

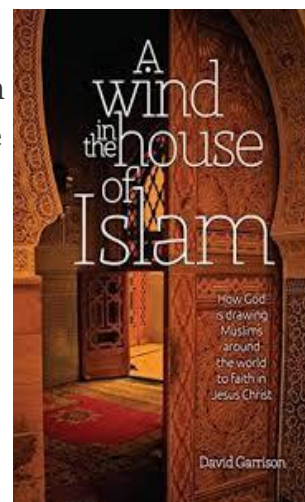
otherwise would never have been reached. Second and third generation churches develop in areas previously inaccessible to Christian missions.

There are too many aspects to the approach to list here. As an example, one stages is described as follows, “It’s about discovering and obeying; not teaching and knowledge”. [\[i\]](#) The author describes this part of the approach by analyzing Jesus’ method of using parables to reach people in His own time:

“Rather than simply telling them the answers, Jesus was patient and seemed quite content to let people process information, internalize it, and eventually understand for themselves what it required of their lives”. [\[ii\]](#)

The book focuses on the necessity of prayer, prepares its reader to appreciate the long term and messy nature of discipleship, and aids in understanding the tricky issues of contextualization.

Another book in the same vein is *A Wind in the House of Islam* by David Garrison. This book also delves into the many areas in the world where entire sections and subcultures of Muslims are coming to Christ in phenomenal ways. The book begins by looking at the first 1400 years of Islamic history, briefly stopping to note a few isolated cases where movements for Christ occurred. However, these cases can be counted on one hand and even then are often suspect because of the surrounding circumstances.



The author divides the world into nine geographic and political regions and then investigates the movements that are happening within each region. In each case, researchers had a methodical set of questions to pose to Muslims who came to Christ. Interviewers would let Muslims tell their own story in their own words, and then followed up on any unanswered questions. The anecdotal accounts that are retold mix well with a more academic and scholarly approach in order to understand just what is happening within the Muslim world. The author does a good job of recognizing and discussing the potential problems with any study on such a grand scale.

Garrison concludes the book by interpreting the overall results. In one chapter, he gives ten reasons why groups of Muslims are choosing Jesus Christ. I found the ninth

reason particularly fascinating: dissatisfaction with Islam itself. As the author notes, “One of the great surprises in the Muslim movements to Christ we examined was that Islam is often its own worst enemy, containing within itself the seeds of its own destruction”. [iii] The author also discusses barriers to these movements and finishes with practical ideas for how each of us might respond this very day to join in what God’s Spirit is doing in the Muslim communities of our world.

I would highly recommend either of these books to anyone intrigued by what God is doing right now in the Muslim world. The news often reports on ISIS, beheadings, and sectarian violence, but never on communities that have been healed and transformed by God. It is so refreshing to learn about how God’s kingdom is arriving in the most unusual of places and ways. *A Wind in the House of Islam* is a bit more scholarly and backed by great research. *Miraculous Movements* contains more personal testimony. I would highly recommend them both.

[i] Trousdale, Jerry. *Miraculous Movements*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012, p42.

[ii] ibid

[iii] Garrison, David. *A Wind in the House of Islam*. Monument CO: WigTake Resources, 2014, p247.

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=425>



45. The Marriage Bed

Posted on January 9, 2015 by Robert Sievers

For those people who are married, it is quite evident that the relationship between men and women is one that is uniquely tight-knit. Married couples share life together with a closeness that is unparalleled. Even more so, the intimacy that comes from the physical side of this union is one that links two people together in a singularly special way in body, soul, and mind. Given this significance, it isn’t surprising that both Christianity and Islam discuss the physical side of marriage.

Much of the practicalities of Islamic life and morals are located only in the Hadith. Yet the Qur'an does contain a few specific such commands. As it happens, one well-known and prominent verse has to do with marriage, specifically some of the more intimate physical aspects of marriage. A verse in the Qur'an that deservedly gets more than its share of ink is Surah 4, verse 34. It is in this verse that Muslim men are given permission to beat their wives for disobedience.

[4.34] Men are the maintainers of women because Allah has made some of them to excel others and because they spend out of their property; the good women are therefore obedient, guarding the unseen as Allah has guarded; and (as to) those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish them, and leave them alone in the sleeping-places and beat them; then if they obey you, do not seek a way against them; surely Allah is High, Great.

Christian apologists have written about this verse abundantly, such as in [this article and video](#) from Acts 17 apologetics. While I don't disagree with anything stated in the video, the focus by Christians is almost always on the section of the verse relating to wife beating. This shouldn't be surprising, given this outrageous prerogative that men are granted in the Qur'an. This verse of the Qur'an does deserve scrutiny, but as usual, I prefer to take the road less traveled.

There are several punishments permitted by this verse. Some Muslims view the verse as saying that men can choose from any of these punishments as the situation warrants, while other Muslim scholars view the verse as prescribing a set order of escalating options for chastening their wife. Regardless, notice what else the Qur'an instructs a man to do in an attempt to discipline his woman. He is instructed to "leave them alone in the sleeping places." Pickthall translates this as "banish them to beds apart" while Yusuf Ali translate the phrase as "refuse to share their beds." In other words, a man is instructed to cut off his wife physically. Withholding sex is one of the prescribed methods in the Qur'an that a man is to use in order to teach his woman a lesson and bring her back in line.

So what does the Bible say about this practice? First, the Bible makes it plain that the physical relationship between men and women is a gift from God, and one to be enjoyed within the constraints of marriage ([Proverbs 5:18-19](#)). Song of Solomon, an entire book of the Bible, is devoted to the attraction that often initiates the deep longing that men and women feel for each other. While many of the verses couch the language regarding the more sensuous aspects of the physical side of the

relationship, it is plain that we are to delight in the beauty and affection it provides ([Song of Solomon 1:2](#), [Song of Solomon 7:1](#)).

But more to the point, the Bible teaches that neither men nor women should withhold sex from their spouses ([1 Corinthians 7:3](#)). The only exception to this rule is by mutual agreement, and even then, only for a limited time and for the sake of prayer ([1 Corinthians 7:5](#)). The point of the Biblical teaching is that men and women are to be actively involved in all parts of the marital relationship, including the physical side. Men and woman are reminded that their spouse has just as much authority as they do over the marriage bed.

As always, when we examine Islamic and Christian practice in detail, we get completely opposing viewpoints. In Islam, men are allowed to withhold physical affection from their wives as punishment. In Christianity, men and women are instructed to enjoy each other within the bounds of marriage without unilaterally depriving the other for any reason. These are exactly opposite instructions. In the deepest and most intimate aspect of our most cherished relationship, the two religions have completely antithetical instructions.

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=437>



46. God's Love

Posted on [February 11, 2015](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

Much is made regarding God's love toward us. Whether Christian or Muslim, most people of these different faiths have a conception of God's love for us. There have been volumes written about the definition of love both from Christian and Muslim perspectives, and how they differ. There can never be enough of these, but I wanted to tackle the subject from a more unique angle in order to expose a significant discrepancy between the love that the God of the Bible has for us, and the definition of love ascribed to Allah in the Qur'an.

The Bible is full of profound statements about God's love ([John 3:16](#)). It's easy to love those who are lovable, but God led the way by loving us when we didn't deserve it. He loved us while we were dead in our sin ([Ephesians 2:4-5](#)) and before we loved Him

([Romans 5:8](#)). He loves us so much He gives everyone who puts their faith in Him the right to be called children of God ([1 John 3:1](#)). God's love is so strong that nothing can sever it ([Romans 8:38-39](#)). Most importantly, the greatest love possible ([John 15:13](#)) is that Jesus Himself died in order to trade His life for each one of ours. Yet it isn't even that God represents love or shows us what true love is, but rather God epitomizes the concept of love ([1 John 4:8](#)). In other words, it isn't that God is loving, but rather that God's essence is love; by definition God is love.

So what does the Qur'an say about Allah's love? Here are a few typical ayat which mention Allah's love,

[2.195] And spend in the way of Allah and cast not yourselves to perdition with your own hands, and do good (to others); surely Allah loves the doers of good.

[3.76] Yea, whoever fulfills his promise and guards (against evil)– then surely Allah loves those who guard (against evil).

Several other verses talk about who Allah loves. He loves “those who trust” [3:159], “those who judge equitably” [5:46], “those who are careful (of their duty)” [9:4], “the doers of justice” [60:8], and “those who fight in His way in ranks as if they were a firm and compact wall” [61:4].

Yet there is something not so obvious still lurking about when the Qur'an is examined in more detail. The Qur'an is also specific about those people whom Allah does NOT love. For example.

[2.190] And fight in the way of Allah with those who fight with you, and do not exceed the limits, surely Allah does not love those who exceed the limits.

[2.276] Allah does not bless usury, and He causes charitable deeds to prosper, and Allah does not love any ungrateful sinner.

[4.107] And do not plead on behalf of those who act unfaithfully to their souls; surely Allah does not love him who is treacherous, sinful;

As it turns out, there are quite a few categories of people that Allah does not love. To name just a few, Allah does not love “the unbelievers” [3:32], “him who is proud, boastful” [4:36], “the mischief-makers [5:64], “the extravagant” [6:141], “the treacherous” [8:58], “anyone who is unfaithful, ungrateful” [22:38], “the exultant” [28:76], “any self-conceited boaster” [31:18], and “the unjust” [42:40].

At first glance, this might seem squarely on par with the God of the Bible, who does not love injustice, pride, or treachery. Yet we need to be very careful not to miss the bigger picture here. There is a major and extremely critical difference being revealed, and it is seen not by looking at what God says in the Bible, but rather by what God never says in the Bible. While God does not love sin, not once does God ever list a category of sinners that He doesn't love. This is no small distinction. You can search the Bible through and through looking for lists of sinners that God removes His love from, and you will never find a single example. That isn't to say God accepts that sin, or that there isn't punishment awaiting those who die in their sin. God certainly does not love the sin and may exact punishment, but He never once ceases His love for sinners.

In [Ezekiel 18:32](#) God calls all men to repentance, no matter where they are or what they have done. In [Luke 5:32](#), Jesus makes this same plea. No matter how embroiled in sin, God never once says that He doesn't love you, because He always does. In Islam, there is category after category of sinner whom Allah does not love.

In Christianity, God hates the sin, but loves the sinner. In Islam, Allah hates the sinner. This realization should make it very clear which conception of God is the correct one.

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=440>



47. Raising the Dead

Posted on [March 7, 2015](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

This blog typically contrasts theological aspects of Christianity and Islam. It delves into the tenets of the two religions in intricate detail. However, sometimes, there are more philosophical questions to be answered. Rather than asking what the tenets are, sometimes the question must be asked why they exist. Why does the Bible say such and such? Why does the Qur'an say, or not say, something? To be specific, let's consider how Muhammad and Jesus interacted with those who had died.

In Islam, there is little doubt about how Muhammad interacted with those who had died. Muhammad said that he was "a plain warner," and that he was to convey

Allah's message to those living around him. Therefore, once someone died, Muhammad had no ability to interact with them anymore. The Qur'an makes it clear that Muhammad is not able to communicate with those who are no longer living. There are two separate ayat which are on point.

[35.22] Neither are the living and the dead alike. Surely Allah makes whom He pleases hear, and you cannot make those hear who are in the graves.

Again the Qur'an says regarding Muhammad,

[27.80] Surely you do not make the dead to hear, and you do not make the deaf to hear the call when they go back retreating.

Islamic commentaries, or tafsir, backup the straightforward meaning of these verses of the Qur'an. This shouldn't be surprising. Once a person dies, it is no longer possible, humanly speaking, to engage with the deceased in any way.

Yet within the pages that recount the life of Jesus, there is an interesting account of one of Jesus' friends, Lazarus, who died ([John 11:14](#)). The sisters of Lazarus had sent for Jesus while he was still sick in the hope that Jesus would cure him ([John 11:3](#)). But rather than directly go to him, Jesus delayed for two days before departing ([John 11:6](#)). By the time Jesus arrived on the scene, the funeral and its associated activities were well underway ([John 11:31](#)) and Lazarus had been dead for four days ([John 11:39](#)).

However, Jesus had something else in mind. Rather than coming and curing the sickness, Jesus was interested in bolstering the disciples' belief ([John 11:15](#)). Coming to the tomb, Jesus engaged in public prayer, not for the sake of necessity, but for the purpose of allowing those nearby to hear and better understand what was happening ([John 11:42](#)). At this point, Jesus calls for Lazarus to come out of the tomb, and he does ([John 11:43-44](#)).

So we see one of the differences between Jesus and Muhammad. Jesus raised the dead, and Muhammad did not. In itself, this observation is monumental enough. It isn't too hard to see this difference and contemplate its significance. And so perhaps this article would end right here. Yet there is something else happening here that needs to be pointed out. The Qur'an also agrees that Jesus raised the dead! In chapter 5, verse 110, the Qur'an quotes Allah as asking Jesus to remember "when you

brought forth the dead by My permission”. While the Bible cites other instances where men of God were able to bring back those who had recently died ([Acts 9:40](#); [Acts 20:10](#)), the Qur’an has no other such records. According to the Qur’an, only Jesus is mentioned as being able to raise the dead.

The Muslim response is that Jesus only performed miracles as a man, and thus only by the permission of Allah. One Muslim author explains this as follows: “The Quran (3:49) clearly states that his miracles were purely granted by Allah and in no way it could be inferred that he had Godly powers, as believed by Christians.”^[i] The issue of whether raising the dead proves Jesus was God in the flesh has been debated on various internet sites. While it’s an important question, I am not interested in repeating those endeavors at this time.

But here is the question that remains for Christians and Muslims. Why? Even If one assumes the Islamic explanation that Jesus was only a prophet and thus only allowed this ability as a prophet, the question remains. Why was Jesus allowed this power to raise the dead while Muhammad was not? It’s an inquiry that requires a cogent and compelling response.

Of course, as Christians, this question stands as well. However, as Christians, we have a clear and straightforward answer ([John 11:25](#)). But from the Islamic perspective, why is there this difference between these two religious figures that Islam deems as prophets. Why was one prophet granted such amazing power to raise the dead, and one not? Why was Jesus permitted the right to do this miracle while Muhammad was not? Like a trail of breadcrumbs, the clues are there for those who want to follow them.

<http://www.iqrasense.com/islamic-belief/jesus-eesa-the-prophet-who-didnt-die.html>

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=444>



48. Grace, Faith, and Works

Posted on [April 8, 2015](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

The more I learn about Islam and Christianity, the more it becomes apparent that the nature of the two religions is completely antithetical. However, exposing this is often painfully arduous, because the issues are extremely complex and require some serious meditation and dissection of thorny theological issues. Because of this, many well-intentioned and intelligent people are fooled into citing similarities in the two religions where disagreement and divergence exists instead.

Perhaps nothing reveals these complex inversions better than examining the issue of salvation as it relates to grace, faith, and works. If you ask a Christian about how to earn salvation, you will be told that such a thing is impossible. Salvation cannot be earned, but rather comes by God's grace alone ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)). Yet Christians also maintain that a person must have faith and repent of their sins and ask for forgiveness ([Acts 17:30-31](#); [Acts 2:38](#)). This faith is demonstrated via works ([James 2:20](#); [Ephesians 2:10](#)). While some Christians might take issue with this combination rather than faith alone, the idea of good works flowing out of a true faith is one that has Biblical support ([James 2:14](#); [James 2:22](#)). So the question arises of how grace, faith, and works interplay. Would the acts of believing in Jesus and repentance of sins in themselves be "works"? Would this mean that a person must have faith and works to be saved, and thus not grace alone? How do these operate in concert? Doesn't grace "by definition" exclude works of any kind? ([Romans 11:6](#)) Hold these thoughts for a moment while the Islamic position is analyzed and this can all be sorted out.

In Islam, the path to salvation is described using strikingly similar language. Since Allah is viewed as sovereign, Muslims will say that salvation is ultimately at his discretion. Muslims will say that it's only by the grace of Allah that a Muslim can be saved, and not by faith or works. (Many Muslims erroneously interchange the concepts of "grace" and "mercy", but that's an article for a later date.) As an example of the predominance of Allah's grace, Muhammad said "There is none whose deeds alone would entitle him to get into Paradise". [\[i\]](#) Yet Muslims are also required to believe that Allah is one, and there are many commands within Islam for Muslims to follow. This faith and its corresponding actions are also seen as critical within Islam. The Qur'an mimics the Christian view of requiring faith in order to obtain salvation. One of many such verses of the Qur'an is as follows,

[5.9] Allah has promised to those who believe and do good deeds (that) they shall have forgiveness and a mighty reward.

In these passages, both faith and good works are mentioned. Muslims have a common understanding regarding the interaction of grace, faith, and works. Salvation within Islam comes by grace, yet faith and works play a key role as well. It is outlined by one Muslim author as follows, “Islam teaches that salvation is attained by God’s Grace, and that God bestows His Grace upon those who have **both** inner belief **and** good works.” [emphasis in the original] [ii]

This all sounds so akin to Christian doctrine. Surely Christianity and Islam are two sides of the same coin in this case. Yet there is something going on here that is so easily missed. Look very closely not at the words being used, but in what order they are being used.

In Islam, while the ultimate decision is left to Allah, grace is given to those who most merit that grace. Perhaps to put it more bluntly, one Muslim described Allah this way, “He is the All-Merciful, He is Mercy. He is compassionate, All-Forgiving, but only for those who deserve it.” [iii] In contrast, God is described as the one who first gives us the grace so that we might even be able to believe and be obedient in the first place. In [John 6:44](#), Jesus tells us “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Grace within Islam is something very different than what it is within Christianity. In Islam, grace is something Allah gives you AFTER you muster up your own faith and works. While it is Allah alone who grants salvation, this occurs as a consequence of believing in Allah and doing good works as defined within Islam. However, in Christianity, grace comes first, before either faith or works. Neither the ability to confess Jesus as Lord or to do anything pleasing to God can happen unless God first grants the grace to do so ([Matthew 16:16-17](#); [Romans 8:7](#)). This Bible consistently teaches salvation by grace alone, with faith and works flowing out as an after-effect.

To put it another way, in Islam, faith and works lead to Allah’s grace. In Christianity, it is God’s grace that leads to faith and works ([Romans 2:4](#)). Complete opposites.

[i] Sahih Muslim, Book #039, #6761

http://www.searchtruth.com/book_display.php?book=039&translator=2&start=0&number=6760#6760

[ii] <http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/1165/>

[iii] <http://www.justaskislam.com/23/salvation-in-islam/>

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=448>



49. Death Be Upon You

Posted on May 8, 2015 by Robert Sievers

Do to my interest in Islam, I often spend time interacting with Muslims in various venues. Often times, these interactions trigger one of these articles. So it was the recently when the topic of Muhammad's kindness came up, particularly in response to harsh treatment. To compare this to Jesus' response, I specifically want to examine Muhammad's response when confronted with verbal abuse.

Within the Muslim community, many Muslim apologists discuss the merits of Muhammad. One of these is that Muhammad was kind to everyone, regardless of the insults or taunts that were hurled at him. These supporters cite the Qur'an, which orders Muslims in general and Muhammad in particular to ignore such verbal abuse. For example,

[33.48] And be not compliant to the unbelievers and the hypocrites, and leave unregarded their annoying talk, and rely on Allah; and Allah is sufficient as a Protector.

And again the Qur'an says,

[50.39] Therefore be patient of what they say, and sing the praise of your Lord before the rising of the sun and before the setting.

The Qur'an teaches Muslims to patiently bear up and disregard criticism. Yet this isn't often the response from Muslims today when Muhammad or Islam itself is disparaged. The reason for this is that Muslims look to the life of Muhammad as the perfect model for Muslim's present-day actions. (Qur'an 33:21). In order to

understand the Muslim reaction to verbal assault, we must examine Muhammad's comebacks when verbally harangued

There are some cases where Muhammad was confronted with severe opposition, and indeed offers a gracious and kind response. However, there are also cases where his response is equally harsh, or even more so. For example, in a [previous article](#), I discussed Muhammad's response to a man named Abu Lahab. When Abu Lahab excoriated Muhammad for wasting his time, the response was the revelation of an entire surah of the Qur'an (Surah 111) dedicated to cursing Abu Lahab as well as his wife. Another example of how Muhammad dealt with verbal abuse is narrated by one of Muhammad's wives, Aisha

The Jews used to greet the Prophet by saying, "As-Samu 'Alaika (i.e., death be upon you), so I understood what they said, and I said to them, "As-Samu 'alaikum wal-la'na (i.e. Death and Allah's Curse be upon you)." The Prophet said, "Be gentle and calm, O 'Aisha, as Allah likes gentleness in all affairs." I said, "O Allah's Prophet! Didn't you hear what they said?" He said, "Didn't you hear me answering them back by saying, 'Alaikum (i.e., the same be upon you)?" [\[i\]](#)

In other words, when greeted with a curse, Muhammad returned it verbatim. This kind of "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" retaliation often feels good in the flesh, but God teaches us something very different in the Bible. In [1 Thessalonians 5:14](#) we are told to never "return evil for evil." These words are echoed in other verses such as [Romans 12:17](#). But God's teaching goes much further than this. Not returning insult for insult isn't the end of the story; we are supposed to return a blessing instead! Form [1 Peter 3:9](#),

9 not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing.

Jesus Himself exemplified this teaching, ([1 Peter 2:23](#)) and as Christians this is to be our guiding principle ([Hebrews 12:3](#)). [Romans 12:21](#) sums it up,

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The difference between Christian and Islamic doctrine couldn't be clearer. The example for Muslims is to return an insult for an insult. In Christianity, when we are insulted, we are to return a blessing instead.

When I started this article, I noted that this article came out of a recent discussion I had with several Muslims. I asked the men to explain to me how Muhammad's actions of returning a curse in the Hadith cited above exemplified his kindness and goodness. After several minutes, the consensus was that they didn't know, but because it was Muhammad who did it, it must be the kind and appropriate thing to do.

Not once have I ever been embarrassed by Jesus' actions, or forced to write off something He did as unexplainable. This, in itself, is another stark difference between the actions of Jesus and Muhammad.

[i] http://www.sahih-bukhari.com/Pages/Bukhari_8_75.php

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=453>



50. The King of Kings

Posted on [June 2, 2015](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

This blog focuses on the differences between Christianity and Islam. Of course, when talking to Muslims, it is often best to discuss similarities of the two religions in order to build a bridge of communication. However, at some point, the truth starts standing out and can no longer be suppressed. Yet these issues need to be handled with reverence and respect ([1 Peter 3:15](#)). Sometimes these distinctives are not caused by an issue of doctrine. Instead, they occur because characters on the two opposing sides of the grand eternal spiritual struggle are referenced identically. The hero is called the villain and the villain is called the hero. To see this in action, consider the one who is entitled "The King of kings".

In the abstract, the title "King of kings" refers to an absolute ruler. It indicates complete and utter sovereignty, such as the kind that God alone possesses. Thus, in the New Testament the title "King of kings" is given to the only one worthy of it, God. Sometimes the title refers to God the Father, such as this reference from [1 Timothy 6:14-16](#).

14 that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

Other times the title “King of kings” refers to God the Son. These references appear in the book of Revelation, where Jesus is fully revealed as the King of kings ([Revelation 17:14](#)). This title of King of kings is so important, it will even be inscribed on His garments when he returns to earth ([Revelation 19:16](#)).

At this time when the true King of kings is being more fully revealed, massive events are underway. A great battle will occur and the unholy trinity of Satan, the beast, and the false prophet will be dealt with. The beast and false prophet will be thrown alive into the lake of fire ([Revelation 19:20](#)). Satan will also be thrown into the lake of fire after being bound for a 1,000 years ([Revelation 20:2](#), [Revelation 20:10](#)). As the enemy of God, Satan is constantly trying to undermine God’s purposes. Yet his doom is guaranteed when the King of kings, the Almighty Sovereign, hands Satan his ultimate defeat. From Satan’s point of view, this Sovereignty of God must be the most terrifying aspect of God.

So what does any of this have to do with Islam? As it happens, in Islam the King of kings is a name that carries a much different connotation. While the term never appears in the Qur’an itself, it does appear in the Hadith, the traditions of Muhammad. In Sahih Bukhari, the most trusted and reliable Hadith collection within Islam, we learn something about Allah. Here is what Muhammad says about Allah and the name “king of kings”.

Allah’s Apostle said, “The most awful name in Allah’s sight on the Day of Resurrection, will be (that of) a man calling himself Malik Al-Amlak (the king of kings).” [\[i\]](#)

Within Islam, the most odious and fearful name from Allah’s point of view is the one calling himself the King of kings. It’s also written within the Islamic literature that Allah’s wrath will be targeted at the one calling himself the King of kings. From another well respected Hadith collection, Sahih Muslim,

Abu Huraira reported from Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) so many ahadith and one of them was this that Allah's Messenger (may peace be upon him) said: The most wretched person in the sight of Allah on the Day of Resurrection and the worst person and target of His wrath would of the person who is called Malik al-Amlak (the King of Kings) for there is no king but Allah. [ii]

Let's recap. From the Christian point of view, Satan is the enemy of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is God who alone who holds the title "King of kings." In the end times Satan will target his wrath at the King of kings, who is God. Yet Satan is in terror at this name because by it his plans to battle God will be thwarted. Conversely, from the Islamic point of view, it is Allah who despises this name "King of kings" and it is toward the one calling himself this title that Allah will pour out his wrath.

So exactly who is it that despises the one calling himself "King of kings?" Is it Allah or Satan?

[i] http://www.sahih-bukhari.com/Pages/Bukhari_8_73.php

[ii]

http://www.searchtruth.com/book_display.php?book=025&translator=2&start=0&number=5339#5339

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=458>



51. What Brings Peace

Posted on July 27, 2015 by Robert Sievers

Finding peace in our hectic and chaotic world can be an elusive task. We all desire peace, whether it is between nation states, between family members, or in the depths of our own hearts. It's the freedom to be unburdened by anxiety regardless of any situation. Peace is the ability to exist in harmony with others around us, even without unity or without being in perfect agreement. Both Islam and Christianity give advice on how to find such peace, but their methods are quite different.

In Christianity, God has much to say about peace. Jesus tells us that peace is one of the things that He grants to those who follow Him. Right after He tells His disciples about the Holy Spirit ([John 14:26](#)) He tells them that they will have peace ([John 14:27](#)). Indeed, peace is one of the aspects of the fruit of the Spirit ([Galatians 5:22](#)). Ultimately, this peace comes from God through His Son Jesus Christ ([Acts 10:36](#)). But this peace isn't even some external emotion that God gives us. Rather, it is Christ Himself who is our peace ([Ephesians 2:14](#)). Peace is something we are to pursue ([Romans 14:19](#)). Letting go of anxiety, being in prayer, and being thankful ([Philippians 4:6](#)) help us tap into the peace that God gives us, and this peace is so vast and outrageous that it will make no sense to the world around us ([Philippians 4:7](#))!

Yet there is another side to tapping into this peace. Ultimately, finding true peace is all predicated upon our having peace with God Himself ([Romans 5:1](#)). It was God who made peace with us by reconciling us to Himself through the forgiveness of sins. And notice what our response is to be ([1 Corinthians 2:18-19](#)).

18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

In other words, since God has made peace with us by forgiving our trespasses, so too we are to go out and do the same with others ([Matthew 6:14](#); [Mark 11:25](#)). Lack of peace comes from the refusal to forgive others. The bitterness and turmoil of not forgiving others only harms ourselves. The command for Christians to forgive others thus ultimately benefits our own state of mind. This call to forgive others because God has first forgiven us is perhaps stated no more clearly than in [Ephesians 4:32](#).

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

The bottom line is that peace comes through forgiveness. The Bible testifies to this truth, and my own personal experience backs this up as well. So what does Islam teach about finding peace, particularly as it relates to forgiveness?

There are various ways in which Islam discusses peace, including the Muslim greeting of “Salam Alaikum”, which means, “Peace be upon you.” This particular

aspect of peace within Islam was discussed in a [previous article](#). Yet the relationship between peace and forgiveness is not as well understood. It is seen in the context of one of the most violent verses of the Qur'an. While many people with knowledge of Islam are familiar with the first verse in this pair, not nearly as many are aware of the second.

*[9.14] Fight them, Allah will punish them by your hands and bring them to disgrace, and assist you against them and heal the hearts of a believing people.
[9.15] And remove the rage of their hearts; and Allah turns (mercifully) to whom He pleases, and Allah is Knowing, Wise.*

People often cite Surah 9:14, which commands Muslims to fight the unbelievers. However, what is discussed less often is the reason the Qur'an gives for them to do so. Specifically the Qur'an says that fighting the unbelievers will "heal their hearts" and "remove the rage of their hearts".

So how do Muslims interpret this promise of the therapeutic impact of jihad? Respected Qur'an commentator Al-Maududi says that Allah promises jihad will "soothe the hearts of many believers." [\[i\]](#) In other words, anxiety and pain can be eliminated by obeying this command to fight. Fighting is the curative remedy that will bring calming peace for the Muslim. Within Islam, peace is promised by waging jihad and through the ensuing conflict with those outside Islam. The Qur'an says that jihad is the balm that heals the anxious heart. As Mark Durie says, "Strange therapy indeed for the human soul!" [\[ii\]](#)

In Christianity, peace is found through forgiveness and reconciliation. In Islam, peace is found through jihad, killing, and conflict. I recognize that stating this may cause discomfort for readers, but it's what the religious texts and Islamic commentators teach. If any Muslim reader would like to dispute these interpretations, I welcome your thoughts and opinions in the comments section of this article. For Christian readers, I suggest we work harder to befriend our Muslim neighbors so that they too can experience real peace.

[\[i\] http://www.searchtruth.com/tafsir/tafsir.php?chapter=9](http://www.searchtruth.com/tafsir/tafsir.php?chapter=9)

[\[ii\] http://www.frontpagemag.com/2015/mark-durie/challenging-islams-warrant-to-kill/](http://www.frontpagemag.com/2015/mark-durie/challenging-islams-warrant-to-kill/)

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=470>



52. Who is Going Where?

Posted on [August 25, 2015](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

In any religion, one of the fundamental issues is that of destiny. By this I mean what happens after we die? Do we go to be with God? If so, under what circumstances are we granted entrance into heaven? In a [previous article](#), I contrasted what Islam taught about Muhammad and what Christianity taught about Jesus regarding their respective destinies. In this article, this issue will be probed even more fully.

In the Qur'an, the following verse tells Muhammad he should be uncertain regarding his future,

[46.9] Say: I am not the first of the apostles, and I do not know what will be done with me or with you: I do not follow anything but that which is revealed to me, and I am nothing but a plain warner.

The idea that Muhammad is unsure of his own salvation should and often does cause anxiety for Muslims who want to go to heaven in the afterlife. After all, if Muhammad himself couldn't be certain of his eternal destiny, how much less hope is there for the average workaday Muslim. For this reason, many recent Islamic apologists restrict the interpretation of the passage above to refer to this life only. But such a limited interpretation disregards a variety of Islamic traditions. In Sahih Bukhari, the most trusted Hadith, one of the early Muslims was discussing whether her father would reside in heaven or Hell. Muhammad expressly stated that nobody could be certain of anyone's final destination, even that of himself. Muhammad stated that "By Allah, though I am the Apostle of Allah, yet I do not know what Allah will do to me,"^[i] This Hadith is reported through several chains of narration, so its authenticity is as strong as it gets.

Some Islamic commentators have tried to backpedal by saying that surely Muhammad must have known his own eternal destiny. They contrive a variety of arguments to put forth such a position. Yet viewing the Hadith forces them to admit the verse of the Qur'an cited earlier refers to things eternal rather than events of Muhammad's life. As an example, in an attempt to explain away the troublesome

ambiguities of Muhammad's final destiny, Bassam Zawadi undermines his own arguments by offering these comments,

... it appears to me that the context of the hadeeth in Saheeh Bukhari makes it appear that the Prophet (peace be upon him) is speaking about how he doesn't know what will happen to him in the Hereafter. [\[ii\]](#)

At best, Muhammad's final destination is ambiguous when viewing it through the lens of Islamic theology. However, a careful and unbiased reading of all the relevant sources points to the likelihood that Muhammad had no assurance of salvation.

I have already contrasted this with what Jesus said about Himself ([John 11:25](#)) and where He was going ([John 14:2-3](#), [John 16:28](#)). Yet as always, let's go down the road less traveled. What does Islam teach about Jesus and His final destiny? Given that Muhammad's eternal destiny is ambiguous, surely the same vagaries must exist within Islam with respect to Jesus as well.

The Qur'an has a number of passages which discuss Jesus. This first one says that Jesus is worthy of regard in the hereafter,

[3.45] When the angels said: O Marium, surely Allah gives you good news with a Word from Him (of one) whose name is the Messiah, Isa son of Marium, worthy of regard in this world and the hereafter and of those who are made near (to Allah).

One early Islamic commentator, ibn Kathir, even went so far as to interpret this verse to mean that Jesus will be so close to Allah as to intercede for His followers. Yet the Qur'an contains an even more explicit statement that Jesus is in paradise in the following verse,

[3.55] And when Allah said: O Isa, I am going to terminate the period of your stay (on earth) and cause you to ascend unto Me and purify you of those who disbelieve and make those who follow you above those who disbelieve to the day of resurrection; then to Me shall be your return, so I will decide between you concerning that in which you differed.

Here the Qur'an flatly states that when Jesus' time on earth is finished, Allah will cause Jesus to ascend to heaven. There is no other way to read this and numerous Hadith back up this plain interpretation. No amount of verbal trickery can

reinterpret this verse to mean anything other than what it says. While the fate of all Muslims and even that of Muhammad is in peril, the Qur'an itself makes it explicitly evident that Jesus' final destination is known; He is in heaven with absolute certainty.

To recap, even the Islamic sources themselves are obscure at best regarding Muhammad's destination, intimating that he cannot know where he would end up. Yet the very same sources testify that Jesus is in heaven! This should be an eye-opener. As a Muslim, which of these two that Islam calls prophets would you prefer to follow?

[i] [Sahih Bukhari, Volume 5, Book 58, Number 266](#)

[ii] http://www.call-to-monotheism.com/was_prophet_muhammad_uncertain_of_his_own_salvation

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=476>



53. The Place of Prominence

Posted on [September 20, 2015](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

Often when I write these articles, I appreciate God all the more by seeing the contrasts with the god of Islam. One such example of this came about as I considered how Muhammad and Jesus interacted with those around them. Specifically, what were the expectations that were laid on those who lived their daily lives in close proximity with these two religious figures? What does the Qur'an teach regarding expected behaviors for those who were near to Muhammad, and how does that correspond to Biblical teachings?

Let's start by examining how Muslims were told to treat Muhammad. Yet even before we do so, this must be put in proper perspective. The Qur'an typically speaks of broader issues regarding attitudes and beliefs, but it rarely details how Muslims are to enact and codify the laws given. For example, the Qur'an tells Muslims to prostrate themselves in prayer, but it doesn't spell out how many times per day, what they are to say, or the order of prayer. These details are stipulated in the Hadiths. All this is to

say that when the Qur'an makes special mention of particulars regarding behavior, it merits extra attention.

Given that, the Qur'an dives into an unusual level of specificity regarding how Muslims should behave around Muhammad. One of the things the Qur'an teaches is that Muslims are not allowed to leave Muhammad without explicitly asking permission first.

[24.62] Only those are believers who believe in Allah and His Apostle, and when they are with him on a momentous affair they go not away until they have asked his permission; surely they who ask your permission are they who believe in Allah and His Apostle; so when they ask your permission for some affair of theirs, give permission to whom you please of them and ask forgiveness for them from Allah; surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful.

In this next verse, Muslims are specifically told not to linger too long in Muhammad's house in order to avoid any extended conversation. Also, nobody is allowed to remarry his widows after his death.

[33.53] O you who believe! do not enter the houses of the Prophet unless permission is given to you for a meal, not waiting for its cooking being finished— but when you are invited, enter, and when you have taken the food, then disperse— not seeking to listen to talk; surely this gives the Prophet trouble, but he forbears from you, and Allah does not forbear from the truth And when you ask of them any goods, ask of them from behind a curtain; this is purer for your hearts and (for) their hearts; and it does not behoove you that you should give trouble to the Apostle of Allah, nor that you should marry his wives after him ever; surely this is grievous in the sight of Allah.

And finally, whenever in the company of Muhammad, people should speak in soft tones so that their good deeds won't be debited from their account.

[49.2] O you who believe! do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet, and do not speak loud to him as you speak loud to one another, lest your deeds became null while you do not perceive.

When you put these all together, the resulting picture becomes quite clear. Muhammad was given the place of honor in whatever circumstance he was in. People

were to give him extra respect as the prophet of Islam, and extra care was to be taken to show Muhammad's elevated level amongst those around him.

Jesus warned about exalting oneself to a place of honor ([Luke 14:8](#)), the consequences of doing so, ([Luke 14:11](#)), and He warned others about following such people ([Luke 20:46](#)).

Alternatively, consider Jesus as He walked on this earth. As God Himself in the flesh, it didn't matter who he was with. He was always the most important person in the room. No finite human could have anything to say of value in the sight of an infinite God. Yet Jesus, though deserving of all respect and worship, placed Himself in the position of servanthood ([Mark 10:45](#)). During a discussion regarding who was the greatest amongst them, Jesus declares that though it is Himself, yet He serves the disciples rather than claim the benefits of any high stature. From [Luke 22:27](#)

For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves.

And of course Jesus illustrates this truth even more pointedly as He washes the disciples' feet ([John 13:5](#)). He doesn't do this because clean feet are the key to godliness. Jesus tells the disciples that even though He is Lord, He takes the lowest position in order to illustrate concepts of humility and servanthood. In other words, He gives this example to illustrate how we are all to serve one another ([John 13:15](#)).

In Islam, Muhammad was given special privileges. In Christianity, Jesus came to serve others. Can the pattern of behaviors be any more dissimilar?

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=481>

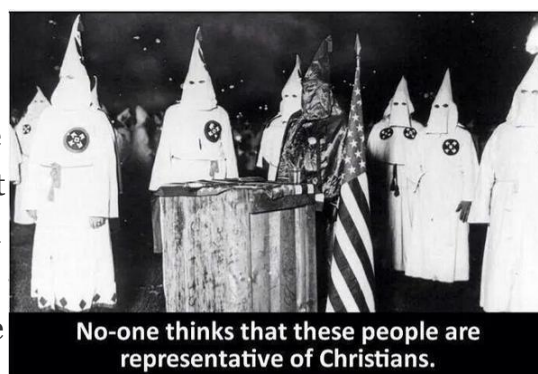


54. The KKK and ISIS

Posted on [December 6, 2015](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

The focus of this blog is predominately theological. Rarely do I delve into political topics. They are typically divisive, and often well-meaning Godly people legitimately differ on how to react to events of our day in ways that honor God. Yet I felt it necessary to make an exception given the vast array of misinformation and sloppy thinking that has accompanied recent events.

The following meme has been floating around the social media sites of late, and it's a perfect example of how inverted thinking leads people to the wrong conclusion. The analogy goes that the KKK was a minority group who considered themselves Christians. ISIS is also a minority group that considers themselves Islamic. Since the KKK didn't represent Christian tenets and ideals on any level, so too ISIS must not reflect Islamic theological views.



Most people read something like this, make a quick correlation, and move along. Particularly in the West where we value democracy so highly, we tend to have a social and cultural blind spot that majority opinion defines truth; that any splinter group could not truly represent the worldview that they themselves claim to uphold.



Many people spend their time invested in political arguments, attempting to thwart this misguided logic by pointing to actual numbers in order to prove a point. For example, regarding ISIS, the president of the United States said that “the overwhelming majority of Muslims reject this ideology.” [\[i\]](#) The exact number he threw out was 99.9%. [\[ii\]](#) However, thorough and respected surveys clearly show this statement to be patently false, as only 57% of Muslims, which is slightly more than half, had an unfavorable view of Al-Qaeda. [\[iii\]](#) But such political arguments sidestep the real issue of the different ways Jesus and Muhammad commanded their followers to behave and it is those teaching that must be explored.

It is true that the KKK uses the Bible in an attempt to justify its positions. Passages such as [Exodus 33:16](#) and [Deuteronomy 7:3](#) are used to condone their view forbidding interracial marriage. Obscure passages such as [Genesis 9:25-26](#) are used to rationalize treating non-whites as inferior. They even use statements by Jesus Himself such as [John 10:26-27](#) to promulgate anti-Semitic views. This seems quite bizarre since Jesus Himself was Jewish.

People hear this kind of talk, and often judge it based on their own internal feelings of indignation rather than seeking to understand how the Bible clearly refutes such mistaken interpretations of itself. Passages such as [Galatians 3:28](#) clearly state there is no distinction between races. [Ephesians 2:14-15](#) discusses how Jesus broke down the barrier between Jew and non-Jew in a way that superseded the Old Testament laws of separation. The entire chapter of Romans 11 points out the spiritual principle that Gentiles should be weary of considering themselves superior to Jews in any way whatsoever. [Romans 11:17-18](#) specifically warns Gentiles against arrogantly assuming a higher status than Jews. Space does not allow for the inclusion of the staggering number of other passages that easily refute the Klan's bizarre twist on Scripture. The bottom line, as stated by blogger Dianna Newman, is that

“when you turn to Christian scriptures, you don’t find Jesus telling people to lynch other people because they have more melanin in their skin.” [\[iv\]](#)

Yet what happens when we apply this same methodology to ISIS? The verses in the Qur'an which mandate jihad are not few and obscure. They are many and clear-cut.

[2.244] And fight in the way of Allah, and know that Allah is Hearing, Knowing.

[4.74] Therefore let those fight in the way of Allah, who sell this world's life for the hereafter; and whoever fights in the way of Allah, then be he slain or be he victorious, We shall grant him a mighty reward.

[4.89] They desire that you should disbelieve as they have disbelieved, so that you might be (all) alike; therefore take not from among them friends until they fly (their homes) in Allah's way; but if they turn back, then seize them and kill them wherever you find them, and take not from among them a friend or a helper.

[8.12] When your Lord revealed to the angels: I am with you, therefore make firm those who believe. I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. Therefore strike off their heads and strike off every fingertip of them.

There are so many other verses in the Qur'an, but time and space runs short. The issue is that these are not obscure passages taken out of context. The Hadiths make it plain that jihad is a part of being a fully practicing Muslim. In Tabari 9:69, Muhammad said "Killing unbelievers is a small matter to us." [v] Abu Huraira also reported as follows,

It has been narrated on the authority of Abu Huraira that the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) said: One who died but did not fight in the way of Allah nor did he express any desire (or determination) for Jihad died the death of a hypocrite. [vi]

There are many, many, more such passages. All of this is to say that when a comparison is made between the KKK and ISIS, what we find is that the two are exact opposites. The KKK takes the Bible out of context and uses it in a way to countermand and oppose Jesus' actual teachings. In the case of ISIS, its members are following the teachings as plainly laid out in the Qur'an and Hadith. The KKK is not following Jesus, but ISIS is following Muhammad. The meme tries to equate these two institutions, when from a theological point of view, they couldn't be more opposite. One doesn't follow the religion it claims to follow; the other one does.

[i]

http://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2015/02/01/obama_this_medieval_interpretation_of_islam_is_rejected_by_999_of_muslims_not_a_religious_war.html

[ii] ibid

[iii] <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/09/10/muslim-publics-share-concerns-about-extremist-groups/>

[iv] <http://diannanewman.org/2015/11/24/all-memes-arent-equal/>

[v] <http://www.thereligionofpeace.com/quran/023-violence.htm>

[vi] [Sahih Muslim, Book 20, Number 4696](#)

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=487>



55. A Tale of Two Trees

Posted on [April 11, 2016](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

The differences between Islam and Christianity are innumerable. Some are immediately and obviously profound. Others seem trivial at first, but expose a deeper theological rift. Consider the almost irrelevant detail of what tree Adam and Eve ate from in the Garden of Eden. The Qur'an and the Bible give divergent descriptions of what this tree was. This seemingly inconsequential discrepancy reveals a much richer truth about the God of the Bible and the god of the Qur'an.

In [Genesis 2:17](#) God instructs Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Both Adam and Eve disobeyed and did eat of it. Perhaps it shouldn't be surprising that the story given in the Qur'an has divergent details. According to the Qur'an, what tree did Adam and Eve eat from? Here is the relevant section,

[20.120] But the Shaitan made an evil suggestion to him; he said: O Adam! Shall I guide you to the tree of immortality and a kingdom which decays not?

Faced with this glaring discrepancy between the two texts, many present day Islamic scholars assert that Muslims don't really know what the tree was. But early Islamic commentators had no trouble stating which tree it was. Ibn Kathir says in his commentary on the Qur'an:

Iblis did not cease prodding them until they both had eaten from it. It was the Tree of Eternity (Shajarat Al-Khuld). This meant that anyone who ate from it would live forever and always remain [\[i\]](#)

In the Qur'an, they took from of the tree of immortality, or eternity. In the Bible, Adam and Eve took from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Why even bother pointing out such a small difference?

The first theological difference that comes to mind is the direct implications of this action. Within Islam, this transgression is viewed as a mistake relating only to Adam. Islam teaches he repented of it, and was forgiven, thus transmitting no consequences to his descendants. Even the immediate removal from the Garden of Eden is not defined as a punishment.

“Adam and Eve left heaven and descended upon earth. Their descent was not one of degradation; rather it was dignified.” [\[ii\]](#)

However, the implications within Christianity are monumental. Eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is what brought sin into the world, and consequently its ramifications. This is especially pertinent in light of the Bible’s discussion of this topic in great detail, culminating in [Romans 5:18](#) and [5:19](#). The fact that the Qur’an completely ignores these consequences of sin is an area that merits its own exploration. Yet there is something much less obvious happening here. As always, it’s the more subtle avenue of thought that will be pursued here.

In the Garden of Eden, there was another tree mentioned, the tree of life ([Genesis 3:22](#)). Nowhere does the Bible say this tree was forbidden from Adam and Eve. In fact, the implication is that the fruit of this tree was given to them, ([Gen 2:16](#)) and that Adam and Eve could have lived forever in a perfect and pure state before God had they not disobeyed. This tree of life appears again in [Revelation 22:2](#), and then another time in [Rev 22:14](#), which emphasize the privilege of partaking of that tree for those who are in heaven. Of course God doesn’t need a tree in paradise to grant us eternal life, but for whatever reason, God mentions it again nonetheless. This tree of life was only off-limits to Adam and Eve after they partook of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because they then could “live forever” ([Gen 3:22](#)) in their unredeemed state.

It is this tree of life, which matches the tree mentioned in the Qur’an, the tree of immortality. In both cases, partaking of this tree gives life in some supernatural way. But look closely at how this tree of immortality, or tree of life, is portrayed in the Bible compared to that of the Qur’an.

The Qur’an portrays the partaking of the tree of immortality as an evil and punishable act that requires repentance. In the Bible, eating from this same tree of life is the reward given to those who through a relationship with Jesus are granted eternity with God. Within Islam, that which gives life is forbidden, and that which brought death and our need for redemption is discounted. With Christianity, that which gives life is our eventual reward and that which brings death was what was originally forbidden. In Islam, the tree of life was off-limits while within Christianity, the tree of life is a gift of life given by God.

Even the minor discrepancies reveal the bizarre depths of theological disagreement.

[i]

http://www.qtafsir.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=897&Itemid=74

[i] <http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/1196/story-of-adam-part-3/>

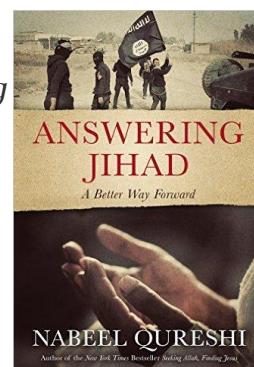
Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=497>

56. Answering Jihad

Posted on June 4, 2016 by Robert Sievers

One of the most volatile and misrepresented subjects when discussing Islam is that of jihad. Yet it's a topic that gets more than its fair share of air time. Conversations on this Islamic religious teaching tend to drift into the arena of politics, which can often be both divisive and unproductive. For these and other reasons, I tend to avoid the subject, except occasionally for a more theological and historical piece such as this [previous article](#) that discussed the crusades. Thankfully, people more skilled than I have tackled the hard questions related to jihad in a concise and coherent manner.

Answering Jihad is the latest book released by Nabeel Qureshi. Nabeel Qureshi has authored several books now, including *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus*, and *No God but One: Allah or Jesus*. He is currently on staff with [Ravi Zacharias International Ministries](#). As a former Muslim, he has a unique understanding and capacity to write on this subject with both authority and compassion.



Nabeel Qureshi shared some of the same aversions to writing about jihad as I did. In the first paragraph of his introduction, he explains that “I informed [my editor] explicitly that I never wanted to write a book on jihad because the topic is so charged that even broaching the subject makes one’s intentions appear suspect.”^[i] Of course, the topic continued to come up over and over again after his talks, and so finally he relented and tackled it head on. Qureshi does not shy away from any of the tough questions, such as “Is Islam a religion of peace,” “What is Radical Islam,” and “Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God?” Most importantly, he approaches the questions from a balanced yet candid perspective. He

puts forth this wild and little understood notion that someone can criticize Islamic teachings while simultaneously loving our Muslim neighbors.

He approaches the subject of whether or not Islam is a religion of peace in the most straightforward and unbiased perspective that I have seen. He comes at it from a number of different angles. One example comes in the chapter where he deals with the common assertion that Islam just needs to undergo a reformation. This precipitated what I thought was the best line of the book.

“I have heard many people, frustrated by the increasing frequency and scale of Islamic terrorism, suggest that Islam needs a reformation. What they may not realize is that radical Islam is the reformation.”[\[ii\]](#)

That indeed is the powerful and misunderstood irony of the current movements within Islam.

Unraveling Islam focuses on the differences between the god of the Qur'an and the God of the Bible. So I would be remiss if I didn't provide Qureshi's take on the question. He adeptly explains why people often mistakenly assume Allah and YHWH are the same being. Then he plainly spells out the errors in this line of thinking. Many articles on this blog have verbalized that the similarities between the two are superficial at best, while in-depth analysis shows how intrinsically opposite they are. Qureshi articulates this assertion in very much the same way,

“The similarities between the God of Islam and the God of Christianity are superficial and at times merely semantic. Though Islam claims that the Muslim God has done some of the same things as the Christian God and sent some of the same people, these are minor overlaps and far less essential to the reality of who God is than fundamental characteristics of his nature and persons. Islam and Christianity overlap in points on the former, but they differ fundamentally on the latter.”[\[iii\]](#)

That sums it up perfectly. Nevertheless, this book is not a scholarly dissertation of the theological differences between Christianity and Islam. Rather, it is a book that suggests a better way forward; a way that we as Christians can embrace the people who are currently caught and trapped within this false religion. Muslims are coming to the United States in great numbers. Rather than being afraid, the church can instead view this as an amazing opportunity. Many of those Muslims who are here now are college students who are training here in order to return to Muslim

countries to be movers and shakers, people of great influence in spiritually empty places. Maintaining intellectual integrity about who Allah is not while simultaneously reaching out to Muslims amongst us showing who Jesus is for the glory of God's kingdom is the challenge of our day. Qureshi skillfully encapsulates the tough issues that correspond to this unique and present opportunity.

[i] Qureshi, Nabeel. Answering Jihad. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016, p 9.

[ii] *ibid*, p. 75

[iii] *ibid*, p. 114

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=502>



57. The Mustard Seed

Posted on October 10, 2016 by Robert Sievers

I never cease to be amazed at how many ways the aspects of Christian and Islamic theology can be contrasted. For example, in each religion, often the very same symbol is used as an illustration. For example, Jesus uses the mustard seed to illustrate a point in the Bible. Similarly, the Qur'an uses the mustard seed to illustrate a point in the Qur'an. Yet the very same item is used as an avenue to illustrate two drastically opposing concepts.

In the Bible, there are two parables that use a mustard seed to make a point. One of them occurs in Matthew 13 and regards the growth and expansion of the kingdom of heaven. The other, which we will examine in more detail, occurs in Matthew 17. To put the parable in context, Jesus has just transfigured himself, and He and the disciples have come down from the mountain where they meet a man whose son is demon possessed ([Matthew 17:15](#)). The man had already been in contact with Jesus' disciples, who were unable to do anything about it ([Matthew 17:16](#)). Jesus heals the boy ([Matthew 17:18](#)) and it is here where the story picks up in verse 19,

19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not drive it out?" 20 And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say

to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.

The issue at hand is faith. How much faith must you have? According to Jesus, the amount of faith required to accomplish the seemingly impossible is tiny. The mustard seed is used as this illustration because of its miniscule size. It takes the smallest amount of faith in order to connect with God and subsequently perform good works. God also makes it clear in the Bible that it is faith alone which leads to salvation ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)). The result of even the tiniest amount of faith is not just the path to salvation, but the power of God to then tap into His power ([Ephesians 2:10](#)). While Jesus' parable doesn't explicitly refer to salvation, it is about faith, and how much you are required to have. The point is that the mustard seed is used as a measure of faith, which is what leads to salvation, which is what later leads to good works.

The Qur'an also mentions the mustard seed. This verse in the Qur'an references salvation more directly. It specifically tells the Muslim faithful about the accuracy of measurement when their deeds are weighed and their eternal destiny will be determined.

[21.47] And We will set up a just balance on the day of resurrection, so no soul shall be dealt with unjustly in the least; and though there be the weight of a grain of mustard seed, (yet) will We bring it, and sufficient are We to take account.

Here the Qur'an refers to the scales that will be used to measure a person's good deeds against their bad deeds on the day of judgement. If the scales are heavy with good deeds, the Muslim can go to paradise. If the scales are light, the Muslim will spend eternity in Hellfire. Here the mustard seed is used as an illustration of how exacting the measurement will be. If your bad deeds outweigh your good deeds by just a smidgeon, your fate is sealed. The Qur'an has other such verses that reiterate the same concept. For example, consider chapter 99, verses 6-8

[99.6-8] On that day men shall come forth in sundry bodies that they may be shown their works. So he who has done an atom's weight of good shall see it. And he who has done an atom's weight of evil shall see it.

Ultimately, Allah's decision on the Muslim's salvation is measured by good deeds versus bad deeds, and everything, no matter how microscopic, will be counted.

So in both Christianity and Islam, the mustard seed is used to signify how tiny something must be in order to be counted. Yet what it refers to isn't just different, but completely antithetical. In Islam, the smallest of acts can be counted against your account. In Christianity, the smallest amount of faith in Jesus provides access to eternal life with Him. Both religions use the tiny mustard seed to make an example, yet the same object represents two totally different conceptions of salvation.

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=519>



58. Unraveling Jihad

Posted on [November 20, 2016](#) by [Robert Sievers](#)

Due to events of the past years, the idea of whether Islam is a religion of peace has been put forward by any number of pundits and media outlets. We hear how the vast majority of Muslims are peaceful people. We also hear other voices insist that Islam is not a religion of peace. Can these two seemingly oppo

sing viewpoints both be true? If so, how can this be?

Part of the answer rests on the difference between Islam and Muslims. On the one hand, there is the issue of Islam and its theology. What does the religion teach? What are its major tenets? What are the commands given to Islam's adherents? Are there multiple ways in which these commands can be interpreted? On the other side of this, how do Muslims choose to live out their lives on a daily basis? How do they interact with others, and what values to they hold dear?

In other words, what are the differences between theology and practice? To understand this distinction, consider the Christian concept of forgiveness. The Bible teaches Christians are to forgive those who wrong them. In fact, Christians are not only told to forgive, but to actually pray for those who are persecute them ([Matthew 5:44](#)). This isn't a command that has multiple interpretations; it stands squarely in plain language. It's an outrageous concept and it goes against every fiber of our being. Our natural instinct calls us to fight back and retaliate. So many Christians don't practice this kind of countercultural response and instead hold on to a grudge

or become embittered toward those who harm them. Why is it that many Christians don't live out this ideal as prescribed by Jesus Himself? We could apply this same idea to any number of concepts, such as tithing, extreme hospitality, or not worrying about tomorrow's troubles. The point is that there is doctrine that a religion teaches and then there is how its adherents actually live out their faith.

Islamic sources such as the Qur'an and Hadith teach jihad as a mandatory part of Islam. There isn't any way to avoid this issue, and I have documented that in abundance in previous articles ([here](#) and [here](#)). I have heard Muslim apologists refer to jihad solely as the internal struggle, but the Qur'an and Hadith don't support this view. For example, blind and lame people were excluded from jihad, and Muhammad's orders regarding jihad were given within the context of his army preparing for and returning from military battle. Yet the reality is that the vast majority of Muslims don't live up to this ideal practice as directly by Islamic theology. I believe there are three major reasons for this inconsistency.

First, many Muslims are basically good and moral people. The idea of jihad is repugnant to them. Therefore, they find ways to diminish or completely ignore the statutes. People have a tremendous capacity to mold a religion to fit their own personal belief system. This is basic human nature, and certainly is not confined to Muslims. Many Muslims follow their conscience rather than the commands regarding jihad as laid out within Islam.

Second, many Muslims are unaware of what their religion teaches. Many mosques, such as the one nearest myself, tend to overlook and sidestep any teachings relating to jihad. They focus on other aspects of the Islamic faith. Any good heretical movement that can split theology and practice does so by overemphasizing some aspects of the religion, while underemphasizing or completely ignoring others. Many Muslims haven't been exposed to the dictates and requirements placed upon them in the Qur'an and Hadith concerning their duty to fight the infidels. In their minds, they are following Islam as best they know how given the partial theology they have been taught.

Third, there are many Muslims who do believe in jihad. However, part of Muhammad's teaching relates not only to jihad itself, but also speaks to its timing. When Muslims are vastly outnumbered, Islam teaches that provisions should be made to bide their time. There are stages of infiltration to increase Muslim numbers. At a later date, when the time is more ripe, more aggressive and direct action can be

taken.^[i] There are many Muslims who secretly believe in jihad, but know that here in the West, that day is still several years away. What the media defines as the “radical” Muslims are those in the third camp who also believe the time is now rather than later. What percentage of Muslims that fully subscribe to jihad, but is patiently waiting for better timing is unknown. Such statistics could probably never be gathered.

In summary, Islam is not a religion of peace. Yet many Muslims are indeed peaceful. It isn't the “radical” Muslims who have perverted Islam. It is the peaceful Muslims who have perverted Islamic theology in order to fit their consciences, their lack of knowledge, or their desire to await a more opportune time to launch more direct and combative action.

[i] Shoebat, Walid. God's War on Terror. Top Executive Media, 2008, p 118-121.

Source: <http://unravelingislam.com/blog/?p=524>

