

Elephant – Islam

4/23/23

Various Text

Sunday AM

As we begin today, I have a fun cartoon that was sent to me that I believe speaks to the point of our series.

Cartoon – *My Harold was thinking about becoming a Buddhist, but then his knee went out and he couldn't sit that way – so he became a Methodist.*

Sadly – I think we'd all be surprised by the number of people who have no idea there's a big discrepancy b/w Buddhism (or whatever) and being Methodist.

If you're just joining us, (2) weeks ago, we began a series comparing the tenets of Christianity with those of the other 4,200 religions/cults. As I stated at the start, my heart in this series isn't to condemn or speak condescendingly of another faith, *but to clarify our differences* to help us to engage people of other faiths.

Remind – we began the series by talking about the infamous/misleading *Elephant Analogy* that speaks of (6) blind men all touching a different part of the same elephant but describing what they're experiencing in vastly different ways – attempting to teach that so long as you believe in something – you'll be good with God.

Problem is – while this sounds nice – when you dig a little deeper you quickly discover that this rationale doesn't work or have a leg to stand on.

(1) The vast majority of the 4200 different religions in existence today believe their way is the only way.

(2) Mankind, b/c of sin, can't get along when they agree on a topic, much less when they can't agree.

(3) The Law of Non-Contradiction definitively settles that we can all be wrong, but we cannot all be right!

Law of Non-Contradiction – *something can't be both true and untrue at the same time within the same context.* So, this law demolishes the warped idea that all roads lead to God. Why? Since every religion/cult has differing beliefs – it's not possible they're all right. In fact, it proves just the opposite – ***while we can all be wrong, we can't all be right.***

Meaning – if *Islam* is right then *Buddhism*, and every other way, is wrong? If *David Koresh* was God's true messenger, then *Mary Baker Eddy* has missed the mark. But if *Jesus* is God's only way, truth, and life as He claimed, then there are no other avenues to God.

To frame our studies – let me remind you of Paul's words to Timothy – *For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.* 2 Timothy 4:3-4

Peter spoke to our need to clarify – *But set apart Christ as Lord of your hearts, always being ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope within you, with meekness and fear.* 3:16

Paul/Peter's point – we need to know what we believe and what others believe (and why) so that we're able to share/defend our faith with others.

Last week we compared Judaism with Christianity. Today, we're going to look at the beliefs of the 2nd largest faith in the world with 1.9 bil. followers – **Islam.**

I The ORIGIN of Islam

Islam began with a man named **Muhammad** who was born in A.D. 570 into a violent/polytheistic culture in the city of Mecca – modern-day Saudi Arabia. Mecca was the religious center housing the **Ka'ba** – a temple housing multiple idols/gods. Muhammad was born into the tribe responsible for presiding over the Ka'ba.

One night, in A.D. 610, at age 40, while meditating inside a cave on the outskirts of Mecca, Muhammad claimed he was visited by the **angel Gabriel** (the angel who appeared to Daniel/Mary). He claimed on that night that he began a series of angelic visitations and revelations that later became the teachings of Muhammad and ultimately the text of the **Quran** – the sacred book of Islam. He also claimed Gabriel declared him to be the final prophet of God (Allah).

In A.D. 620, after his wife's death, Muhammed said Gabriel brought him by night to Jerusalem on the back of a heavenly horse (*Quran 17:1*). In Jerusalem, it's said he conversed with Jesus, Moses, and Abraham, before being taken by a ladder to Heaven for the night. The Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, completed in A.D. 691, was built on the spot where Muslims believe he ascended into Heaven.

In A.D. 632, at 63, Muhammad died a natural death in the city of Medina, **where his tomb is today**. After his death, disagreement about who should succeed him as the leader of Islam caused a rift b/w (2) groups that continues today. **Sunnis** believe the leader should be elected democratically from Muhammad's closest followers while the **Shi'ites** claim his successor should come from his bloodline. (*not doctrinal but political*)

Sunnis rep. 85% of Islam – Shi'a rep. 15%. They don't respect each other – both on a mission to bring Islam to the world by conversion or conquering.

II The Five PILLARS of Islam

The (5) pillars are the key practices Muslims are obligated to fulfill thru-out their lives. These practices build on each other to form the basis of Muslim life.

Pillar 1 – sincerely profess the **SHAHADA** – The fundamental confession of Islam is that *there is no God but Allah – and Muhammad is his prophet*.

Pillar 2 – **SALAH** – Ritual prayers Muslims are required to pray (5) times each day in a prescribed manner in the direction of Mecca – the holy city.

Pillar 3 – **ZAKAT** – Islamic law requires Muslims to give at least 2.5% of their income as an offering to care for widows, orphans, the sick, the poor, and the needy.

Pillar 4 – **SAWM** – In the 9th lunar month of Ramadan, from sunrise to sunset, Muslims fast from food, drink, tobacco, and sexual activity.

Pillar 5 – **HAJJ** – The pilgrimage to Mecca – if possible, every Muslim who is physically/financially able is required to journey to Mecca at least once in their lifetime to engage in ritual worship around the Ka'ba. *Quran 2:196*

Pillar 6 – **JIHAD** – Many Muslims add a 6th pillar – **Jihad** means *struggle*. There are (2) types of jihad – **Greater** – *jihad of the heart* – the battle within each person's heart; and **Lessor** – *jihad of the pen* – which is the persuasion and promotion of Islam thru written/oral instruction and force.

III The **BELIEFS** of Islam

Regarding **GOD** – Muslims are fiercely monotheistic – *not trinity*. They believe Allah is the only true God. **Allah** means – **THE** God. He is just, all-knowing, and sovereign.

While Judaism, Christianity, and Islam trace their faith heritage to the God of Abraham – they have a great discrepancy in how to know and worship this God with neither of these faiths agreeing with the other. Unlike Jehovah – *Quran 4:48* teaches Allah isn't triune and Jesus wasn't the Son. In fact, to say God has a Son or is Trinity is an *unforgivable sin (shirk)* in Islam.

Christians believe in one true God (Jehovah). He is **TRINITY** revealed in Scripture as Father, Son, H.S.

Regarding **PROPHETS** – (*Quran 6:84*) Muhammad taught Allah raised up 124,000 different prophets thru-out history including Abe, Moses, David – and Jesus.

While the Quran says these men were prophets – Muhammad was the last, most respected of Allah's prophets. Since he came last, he supersedes all others.

JESUS – Muslims believe Jesus was a prophet, born of a virgin. He was sinless, performed miracles, and was given the title of Messiah. But Islam vehemently denies His divinity/crucifixion/resurrection (*Allah's prophet wouldn't suffer such humiliation*). Instead, He was taken to paradise and will return to defeat the anti-Christ, confess Islam, and bring a new millennium.

Christians believe Jesus is the physical representation of God – God in the flesh revealed as the Son – who entered humanity to die on the cross to atone for sin to make it possible for all people to be reconciled with God. Regarding **SCRIPTURE** – Muslims believe in (4) divinely inspired books given to us thru the prophets.

- The **TAWRAT** of Moses – the Pentateuch
- The **ZABUR** – the Psalms of David
- The **INJIL** – the Gospel of Jesus
- The **QURAN** – the revelations of Muhammad

The Quran is the most sacred authority in Islam – **Quran** is Arabic for *recitation* and refers to the collection of revelations supposedly given to Muhammad in A.D. 610 by Allah thru the angel Gabriel in a cave outside Mecca.

In addition to the Quran, Muhammad developed a set of *sayings* called, **Sunnah** (path) gathered into a work – **Hadith** (talk). It's a supplement to the Quran like the Talmud is to the Hebrew Bible in Judaism.

Another body of teachings is the **Shariah** (law) – it is a legal interpretation of the Quran/Sunnah. The Shariah lays down a strict, comprehensive guide to life and conduct for Muslims. It includes prohibitions against eating pork, drinking alcohol, and punishments for stealing, adultery, denying Islam, and blasphemy.

Muslims believe Jews/Christians corrupted their Scriptures – the Quran is Allah's final word to man – and it **supersedes/overrules** all previous writings.

Christians believe only the Old Testament & New Testament are the inspired, infallible Word of God authoritative for life and truth.

Regarding **SIN** – Islam claims there was no original sin and that humans are born with hearts that are clean slates. Thus, sin is an act of the will and not a state of being. If they commit sins, these can be overcome by acts of the will. So, **there's no need for a Savior**.

Christians believe all people have been born corrupted by sin, and as a result, are spiritually dead apart from God's grace. So, we're all in desperate need of a Savior to provide for our forgiveness for sin.

Regarding **SALVATION** – In Islam, salvation is a complex issue with varying perspectives. In general, a person's fate is entirely in the hands of Allah who requires the true/perfect devotion of one's life to the cause/law of Allah. Salvation involves overcoming the effect of one's personal mistakes and weaknesses thru good deeds with a view of attaining paradise by conformity to the straight path of Islam.

Christians believe salvation can't be attained thru any form of human effort but solely thru the finished work of Christ on the cross. We're saved by grace thru faith.

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires/thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But b/c of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms, in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ. For it is by grace you have been saved thru faith – and this is not from yourselves, it's the gift of God – not by works, so no one can boast. Ephesians 2:1-9

This is a good place to wrap up and differentiate. While there are some obvious differences b/w Islam and Christianity – the biggest difference to me is that while both are religions of submission, Islam is about submitting to Islamic Law whereas Christianity is about submission to God's grace. Muslims are responsible to earn Allah's favor thru strict adherence to their laws, whereas Christians are gifted God's grace by faith alone in the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and His subsequent resurrection.

So, once again, just like with Judaism, while there are a number of differences – it all comes down to Jesus! Either He was whom He said He was and did what He said He'd do – or He wasn't and didn't. But if He was – then He is the one and only way to God and the forgiveness of sin.