

# **A Comparative Analysis of the Religion of Islam**

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## **Introduction to A Comparative Analysis of the Religion of Islam**

There are currently well over one and one half billion adherents of Islam worldwide. These devout followers of Muhammad are known as Muslims, and their numbers are growing rapidly, so much so that Islam as a competing faith threatening to displace Christianity as the dominant faith on earth cannot be dismissed. Presently, about one in every three of the earth's estimated total population of seven billion are professing Christians, whereas the Muslim demographic is already around one in five. To understand and properly evaluate this rapid growth of Islam, we need to learn as much as possible about its origin and history, as well as its religious doctrines and practices. In addition, we need to understand how Islamic doctrines deviate from sound biblical teaching. The goal of this booklet is to provide a starting point for Christians to acquire that necessary information.

Judaism, Islam, and Christianity are commonly recognized as three Abrahamic religions each of which purports to rest upon a covenant blessing that God promised Abraham would be extended throughout his future generations. The Jew finds biblical evidence of that heritage through Isaac (cf. Ge.17:19), the Muslim stakes a claim to it through Ishmael (cf. Ge.17:20), and the Christian recognizes it as a spiritual heritage based upon an Abrahamic-like faith and unshakable trust in God's Word (cf. Ro. 4:1-3; 13-16).

Secularists, pseudo-believers, and many ill-informed traditional Christians assume that Islam is a religion on an equal standing with Christianity inasmuch as Muslims hold to many beliefs that seem quite similar to those of Christianity. These include: 1) belief in one God who is the Sovereign Creator and ruler of all things and worthy of receiving mankind's worship; 2) belief in the veracity of prophecy and in the God-sent prophets of old; 3) the belief that Jesus was a great prophet sent to earth by God, and that He was virgin-born to a woman named Mary; 4) belief in angels as created spirit beings; 5) belief in Satan as the great deceiver; 6) belief in the extreme importance of prayer; 7) belief in a future second-coming of Jesus to earth; 8) belief in the resurrection of the dead; 9) belief in a coming day of final judgment; 10) belief in the existence of Heaven and Hell.

Moreover, Islam shares some significant moral standards with Christianity including, 1) the prohibition of blasphemy (cf. Ex.20:7); 2) the prohibition of theft (cf. Ex.20:15); 3) the prohibition of adultery (cf. Ex. 20:14) and fornication (cf. 1Th.4:3); 4) the importance of caring for the poor and unfortunate (cf. 1Jn. 3:17,18). In addition, Islam prohibits the drinking of alcoholic beverages and forbids gambling, both of which many devout Christians would consider to be commendable virtues.

On the surface, these similarities would seem to suggest a reasonably close correlation of Islamic and Christian doctrines and practice. However, when we closely compare the core orthodox beliefs of Islam with those of biblical Christianity, we are not so much struck by their similarities as we are by their stark contrasts and extreme contradictions. While Christianity is centered upon the person of Jesus Christ, Islam is centered upon the teachings of their prophet Muhammad. Whereas Christianity is

focused on the grace of God to redeem a fallen human race, Islam denies mankind's disastrous fall and its desperate need for redemption. Islam generally characterizes sin as unfortunate mistakes and misdeeds committed as a consequence of man's imperfect creation, whereas a Christian recognizes all human sin – from the time of Adam's initial rebellious act on – as a terrible offense against a holy God that not only demands man's physical death but calls for his alienation from God and eternal torment in Hell.

Although Muslims recognize Jesus as a great prophet born of the virgin Mary through miraculous means, they straight-out deny his deity in accord with Islam's extremely strict monotheistic view of the Divine Being. While they see Jesus as being God-sent, they misconstrue his primary purpose for coming to earth as being narrowly focused upon the Jewish nation in an effort to conform their Old-Covenant law to Islamic law and doctrine. The Christian Bible clearly states that Jesus' primary purpose for coming to earth was to die as a propitiation for mankind's sin (cf. 1Jn.2:2).

In the brief analysis that follows, we shall only be able to provide a preliminary overview of major orthodox Islamic beliefs and practices; this analysis is not intended to be a complete restatement of the Islamic faith. Moreover, there is so much variation of Islamic thought and interpretation that a detailed consensus of orthodox Islamic doctrine and tradition that is directly applicable to every professing Muslim is not possible.

This appraisal of the Islamic belief system is written from a committed biblical Christian perspective; nevertheless, we trust that it is reasonably accurate in restating orthodox Islamic doctrines and traditions. We shall state significant orthodox Islamic doctrines, traditions, and practices in the main text of this work and respond with explanatory comments and corresponding biblical Christian teaching within an expanded series of footnotes. When specific verses of the Qur'an are referred to, we shall use the letter "S" followed by the *sura* (i.e., chapter) number, a colon, and then the *ayat* (i.e., verse) number/s (e.g., S5:34). As to Bible verse references, we shall continue to utilize our standard notation. We shall reference Scripture taken from the *Authorized King James Version* of the Bible supplemented by an interpretation of its doctrinal content that is found throughout *Comprehensively Reformed Christianity (CRC)*, Books I, II, and III – as well as our many newsletters.