

**Core Seminar**

**Evangelism**

**Class 13: Sharing the Gospel with Muslims**

1. Introduction
   1. West Hall Introduction

I've heard Matt Schmucker make the point in the Parenthood core seminar that Fathers have a tremendous influence on the children -- explaining why in days gone past Schmucker toddlers stalk the church property bemoaning the Redskins and praising the Terps.

In the evangelism core seminar this morning we finish with a look at taking the gospel to the followers of Allah. In this class we're going to take a close look at what kind of a god Allah is and why your Muslim friends are literally dieing for want of hearing the good news of their true Father and his son Jesus.

* 1. Class Introduction

Too often Christians place an incredible pressure on themselves to have "all the right answers" and to be ready to say "just the right thing" before they enter into an evangelistic conversation.

In part, this is probably a godly desire to help others.

In part, however, it’s probably also mixed with a serious lack of faith in God's ability to use what we do know to minister to others.

These fears may be more concentrated when it comes to engaging Muslims than perhaps any other religious group.

This is not a class that will prepare you to apologetically engage your Muslim friends point-by-point on doctrine, the veracity of scripture, or other common Islamic objections to the gospel.

We do, however, hope that this class kindles a godly compassion for those enslaved by Islam and emboldens you to trust that God is delighted to win glory to himself not only by saving Muslims, but even by working through your weakness to do so.

1. Basic Beliefs

At first glance, there is a lot of common ground shared between Christian and Muslim beliefs.

* We both believe in **one** God who **created** everything and **rules** everything.
* We both use many of the same words to describe God: "sovereign," "omniscient," "omnipotent," "merciful," "just," "holy," "righteous," "benevolent," etc.
* We both agree man will stand before God and be **judged** to eternal reward or eternal punishment.
* We both use words like "repentance" and "faith" to describe the needful response of man to God.

However, these similarities are only skin deep because, although we use the same words, we mean very different things.

[**Example Story:** Different definitions of "the gospel" from Dever's *The Gospel & Personal Evangelism*.]

Ultimately, the question of how anyone will be reconciled to God and enter into his presence is inextricably connected to who God reveals himself to be.

* 1. God

The oneness of God is Islam's central creed. This is more than simply an assertion of monotheism. The full sense of the creed, "There is no God but Allah" in Arabic is certainly this, but also more:

* + Absolute denial of all plurality of nature or person in God
  + A timeless unity of that which is unbegetting and unbegotten
  + A comprehensiveness of all physical, intellectual and moral force in the universe that renders all creation unconditionally passive, without agency

The Islamic doctrine of God implies a Supreme Being:

* + Immeasurably exalted above and wholly dissimilar from creation;
  + Who communicates nothing to his creatures (whose *apparent* power to act are ever his will alone) and who in return receives nothing from them;
  + Whose purpose in creation is to manifest his own power;
  + Whose primary impulse towards mankind is that they never attribute to themselves what is rightfully his.

As one 17th century observer commented, referring to Allah and the creed:

"But He himself, sterile in His inaccessible height, neither loving nor enjoying aught save His own self-measured decree, without son, companion or counselor, is no less barren for Himsel than for His creatures; and his own barrenness and lone egoism in Himself is the cause and rule of His indifferent and unregarding despotism around. **The first note is the key of the whole tune**, and the primal idea of God runs through and modifies the whole system and creed that centres on Him."

As I prepared this, I couldn’t help but be put in mind of the full force of the terrible, fearfulness of God; but without his love, without his mercy, and without his purpose to redeem for Himself a His own people to live forever with Him in his forever kingdom.

* 1. Man

Despite Muslims’ professedly high reverence for God, Islam is a very man-centered religion.

In Islam, the chief end of man is not to know God and enjoy Him forever, but to *obey* God. The very word "Islam" means submission and the vast majority of Islamic writings are about laws: what is permissible and what is forbidden.

Man himself is not inherently depraved in his inmost being, but rather weak or merely ignorant. His nature before and after the fall are unchanged.

Neither is man made in God's image, nor can he ever aspire to relate to God. Man will only enter into God's presence once, to be judged. If condemned, he will go to hell. If rewarded, he will be delivered into a man- centric paradise in which Allah does not participate.

In preparing this, the contrast between Allah and God struck me again. The first verb of the Bible shows God initiating toward his people (“God created”), the first verb of the Quran is man-centric: “we worship.”

* 1. Sin

Sin is a difficult concept for Christians and Muslims to speak meaningfully about together because we mean such different things by the word.

Islamic scholars endlessly debate the taxonomy of sin -- which sins are great and which are small -- but there is no debate about the nature of sin.

Nothing is right or wrong by nature, but becomes so by the fiat of Allah.

* What Allah forbids is sin, what he permits is right and lawful.
* Allah’s commands are not rooted in his nature, with which we cannot relate.
* Nor are they imprinted on our conscience -- a concept for which the Quran has no equivalence -- as we are in no way made in his image.
* Nor is sin immutable, as the commands of Allah changed over the course of Quranic revelation: that which was sin before is not sin and cannot be sin at the time that Allah later allows it.

Finally, although Muslims absolutely agree on the one hand that sin creates a problem for man and incurs Allah's wrath, on the other hand sin is still fundamentally *'evil of done to oneself'* (c.f. Sura 6:1) as the god of Islam stands too far above and removed from us to be directly concerned or offended by our disobedience any more than we are concerned for or impacted by the life an ant a thousand miles removed.

* 1. Salvation

The Muslim idea of salvation greatly differs from our Biblical understanding of the term.

When Muslim theologians talk about what Allah gives us – what Christians would call “salvation”—they refer to *falah:* meaning success, blessing or simply a reward.

To obtain Allah's reward, the main focus in Islam is obedience to walk in the “straight path” of righteousness outlined by the Quran: a path of works also known as the Five Pillars of Islam:

* + The *shahada,* which is the confession one must repeat three times to become Muslim.
  + *Salat,* or Prayers: Ritual prayers are performed five times a day, facing Mecca.
  + Fasting during *Ramadan*: These fasting hours are meant to cause Muslims to empathize with the poor and impoverished.
  + *Zakat,* or the Giving of Alms to the poor.
  + *Hajj,* or the Pilgrimage to Mecca, to be made at least once in a lifetime.

Muslims believe that on the Day of Judgment, Allah will weigh out our sins and good works on the scale of justice, will listen to the intercession of his prophet Muhammed, and will then make his own arbitrary and inscrutable judgement -- a judgement which is already fore-ordained and which, because all creation is an extension of the will and force of Allah in the first place, in a very impactful sense cannot be affected.

And yet, having no other choice, and in fear for which there is no other salve, millions of followers of Islam the world over practice these works and hope it will be enough.

* + 1. *Implication 1: The Community*

*Perhaps because there is no other assurance of salvation except what affirmation can be given by those around them, most Muslims zealously identify with religion as a collective, communal experience. Preserving one’s family’s honor and respectability in the community becomes incredibly important,* ***particularly because this is what primarily validates them as devout followers when there is no assurance of salvation.*** *This causes many Muslims to be heavily concerned with outside appearances.*

* + 1. *Implication 2: Sharia*

*From its inception, Islam the religion has been interdependent with Islam the state. In a works-based-religion where right action supercedes right hear, Islamic law (sharia) exists to enforce religious conduct that keeps all people from sin regardless of their convictions. Extending sharia as a political system is also a religious duty and a good work that does good to all those who come under it. This is important to understand for Christians as the integration of political and religious identity in Muslims contributes to their assumption that similarly, all westerners are also Christians. This means that there is often a confused association of the politics and entertainments of secular western culture with Christianity.*

1. Key Divergences from Biblical Christianity

We can agree with Muslims that God is holy, just, righteous and our judge. But our Muslim friends to not understand that:

* + God is holy and by his nature cannot abide any evil;
  + that because he is holy that he will judge all evil without exception;
  + nor that our righteous judge is none other than the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Unless we tell them, they will enter eternity and be stunned with eternal grief to find waiting there the Son of God whom they rejected in life.

In particular, we need to be faithful and bold to make the following four things clear.

* 1. Sin offends our holy God

Specific sins are not the fundamental problem: the existence and ugliness of sin itself is the problem.

Whether:

* “minor” or “major…”
* by commission or by omission…
* by word or by deed or by thought…

…sin is not simply a transgression of the law, but it is a breaking of relationship with the person of God.

Sin of any manner is an expression of rebellion for which God requires atoning sacrifice (c.f. Leviticus 4). We must challenge our Muslim friends' concepts of "permitted" and "forbidden" with the grim reality of "guilt" and "transgression."

* 1. Genuine repentance requires abandoning sin

Repentance requires more than just sorrow over "major" transgressions. Repentance is a complete turning away, more like crossing a bridge and setting it alight behind us so that we may never travel back to a path of sinful desires and habits again (c.f. Ephesians 4:22-23).

* 1. Genuine faith requires accurate knowledge of, agreement with, and personal acceptance of what God has done for us in Jesus

Faith is no more the mere reciting the shahada than it is the praying of the sinner’s prayer. Faith is a gift from God wherein the sinner personally entrusts himself to Jesus as Lord and Savior who purchases forgiveness and eternal life through his crucifixion and resurrection.

There was no one who could ever satisfy God's wrath against sin except God himself.

There has never been anyone who should satisfy God's wrath except men, who have incurred it.

Thus, to satisfy justice ***and*** to give mercy the unique person of Christ -- perfect God ***and*** perfect man-- entered history to do what ***only*** God could do yet what ***only*** man should do; and by a guiltless death he bore away the guilt of ***all*** those who would repent and believe in Him.

* 1. Forgiveness with God comes by grace alone apart from any works of righteousness

Genuine conversion issues forth in good works and a changed life (c.f. Ephesians 2:10), but good works and a moral life do not earn God's forgiveness or salvation. Adding anything to the cross of Christ is slavery to the Law and makes Christ "of no value to [us] at all." Depending on our own righteousness alienates us from Christ and God's grace (c.f. Galations 5:1- 4).

1. Evangelism
   1. Use the Word of God
      1. Introduce them to Jesus

* Christianity Explored
* Bible-study

You'll be surprised how often Muslims will initiate questions about Jesus if your are living a life that invites them to do so.

* + - 1. Personalize sin in the same way Christ did for His hearers

In your discussions, make sin a personal matter rather than an "academic" idea. Press home the point of sin and guilt graciously but clearly.

To the extent that you are able, foster a sense of urgency. Like the Israelites of Jesus time, many Muslims take heaven for granted because they are child of Abraham and "a good Muslim." Many have never considered the possibility that they might go to hell and opening their eyes to this may be the most loving thing you can do.

[Woman at the Well / Sermon on the Mount]

* + - 1. Tell Stories About Jesus’ Grace

I would also encourage you to focus on telling your Muslim friends stories about ways Jesus challenged and sometimes rejected the self- righteous but embraced the marginalized and sick sinners who knew their need of Him. This will likely stir up questions in your Muslim friend, because the way Christ confronts works-righteousness is the *complete opposite* of what Islam glorifies. Here are a few stories from the Gospel to help you get started:

* 1. The parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). **Use the example of the self-righteous brother to show how pride estranges us from God, and that we must also repent of the false sense of self- righteousness that hardens our hearts towards others. This may incite a visible response of shock and disbelief from your Muslim friend, since Islamic cultures take respecting their elders, especially the father, and preserving a family’s honor very seriously**.
  2. The story of the tax collector and the Pharisee who both went to the temple to pray (Luke 18:9- 14).
  3. The bleeding woman who touches the cloak of Jesus and is healed (Luke 8:40-48). Your Muslim friend may find it appalling that a bleeding woman who would be considered too unclean to even pray to Allah would touch the Holy One, yet Jesus calls her daughter, speaks with her, and then heals her. **Use this story to show them that Christ’s holiness purifies the undeserving, the unholy.**
     + 1. Explain the seriousness of sin and the need for a sacrifice.

As an example, Muslims go through a meticulous process of ceremonial washing when they have been exposed to external defilements in order to attain proper standing before Allah. Ask your Muslim friend:

How it is that our hearts and minds will be cleansed of filthy, dirty sin? She can cleanse her hands and body, but how does she cleanse her heart?

Share the good news with her that: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). Only Jesus can cleanse our hearts, minds, and souls to make us acceptable before God.

Be patient with your Muslim friend when you explain why Jesus had to die. Show them that sacrifices for atonement have been a part of prophetic tradition as early as Adam and Eve, followed by more examples at the temple/Holy of Holies, and Isaiah 53. Remind them of the warning God gave Adam and Eve in the Garden: “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eatof it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17). God cannot lie, and He must stay true to His word when He said that sin will lead to death.

* + - 1. Emphasize the resurrection

Spend a long time emphasizing God’s victory through the resurrection. You cannot stress this enough. Unfortunately, many Christians tend to mention the resurrection as a “side note” when they present the gospel. But precisely because our Muslim friends often find the death of Christ to be a stumbling block, we must be careful to explain that through the resurrection of Christ God was victorious, defeated sin, Satan, and the evil which so many Muslims fear.  Because of the resurrection, Jesus stands in authority, and has placed all things under His feet. Because Jesus conquered sin and death and was raised to life, those who follow Him also die to their sins and are raised to new life in the way of Christ. Invite your Muslim friend to follow a risen, all-powerful, conquering Savior!

* + 1. Use Biblical language

Remember that your Muslim friend shares terms like "repentance" and "faith" and may struggle to understand how your faith is distinctive. Instead, try to use more distinctive, bilblical language that they won't be able to ignore:

* Born again: John 3:3
* Born of God: John 3:7-8, John 1:12-13
* Raised from death to life: Romans 6:1-5
* United to Christ: Romans 6:5, Galatians 2:20, Colossians 3:3
* New creation: 2 Corinthians 5:17-18
  + 1. Know your Old Testament

Muslims LOVE the prophets, especially Abraham and Moses, and stories about God’s work through them. Show them how even the prophets in the Old Testament all foreshadowed God’s plan of ultimate plan of redemption through Christ.

For example, Muslims love the story of Abraham who was willing to sacrifice His son because it shows that Abraham had such faith in Allah that he was willing to obey God even if it meant the death of his son. (As a side note, the Quran teaches it was Ishmael, not Isaac). This is such an important story in Islamic tradition that Muslims commemorate it every year through the *Eid Al Adha* holiday. So explain to your Muslim friend that all of us are just like Abraham’s son in that our sin puts a death sentence on our lives. BUT, just as Allah sent an animal in place of Abraham’s son, our gracious God provided a sacrifice though Jesus Christ.

* 1. Be continually in prayer

It is the Holy Spirit who seeks and saves the lost. Seek his guidance and power as you present the Word.

* 1. Be a genuine friend
     1. Show your good works.

Tell them why you do the good works that you do. If you are a Christian being conformed in the likeness of Jesus, your Muslim friend should most certainly notice a difference between you and other Americans. Undoubtedly, your good works will commend your faith, but be very clear that you pursue holiness as a response to the gift of salvation He has given you.

Your Muslim friend may try to find ways to say you are both the same in your desire to honor God. Gently, yet boldly, point out that while your Muslim friend is trying to earn God’s favor, you are responding to His unconditional love. “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

* + 1. Love them unconditionally.

Show them hospitality. Seek to bless them with the generosity of Christ, regardless of how they initially respond to the gospel. As important as it is that you verbally explain the gospel, it is just as crucial that you love and serve your Muslim friends. This helps to put flesh on the claims we make about Christ.  This is crucial because it shows our Muslim friends that contrary to Islam, the gospel is not merely about external adherence to a system of laws and instructions. Our loving actions toward our Muslim friends will show them the love of God Himself.

* 1. Ask thought-provoking questions
* Do you expect to go to heaven?
* How do you know God will accept you?
* What does the Quran teach about forgiveness? / May I show you what the Bible teaches?
* What will heaven be like (will God be there)?
* Get to Jesus and move the conversation to the critical question: "who is Jesus?"
  1. Listen attentively

When you ask questions, listen to the answer no matter how long it takes. Don't just look for the pause that lets you jump in with an answer. Be an active listener and you'll be surprised what you learn.

* 1. Present your beliefs boldly

State what you believe clearly and openly and without apology. Show scripture passages to support those teachings. This places the responsibility for doctrine where it belongs -- on the Word of God.

* 1. Reason, don't argue

Arguments may win the point but lose the hearing. Avoid vain disputation. Keep getting back to Jesus.

* 1. Don't denigrate Muhammad or the Quran

Just don't.

* 1. Be mindful of cultural sensitivities

Guard your tongue, be careful of how you physically handle your Bible (a holy text), be sensitive to gender customs.

* 1. Persevere

Islam is enslaving and Muslims have a lot of re-thinking to do when they encounter the gospel. Be patient and strive to be faithful. [IMB: 9 years].

* 1. Engage the corporate witness of the church

Remember, the Bible is God’s living and active word that will change hearts and lives (Isaiah 55). Realize that when we invite our Muslim friends to put their faith in Christ, we are asking them to put their family relationships, reputation, and in some instances, their very lives in jeopardy. Your Muslim friend is very much accustomed to identifying with the collective, and it would serve him well to be surrounded by a loving community of God’s people, as he or she considers the claims of Jesus and Lord willing, turning their life to Christ. Show your Muslim friend the comforting truths of God’s word in Matthew 19:29: “And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfoldand will inherit eternal life.”

**Remember, the unity of the local church reveals that Christ has come!**

1. Conclusion

Our hope in reaching our Muslim friends is not vast knowledge of Islam, our clever strategies, or our squeaky clean lives. Our hope is in God himself and his supernatural power to save—the gospel of Jesus Christ. It does help to understand some of the nuance of Islamic beliefs, and we should be wise in the specific ways we interact with Muslims.

But ultimately, it is God who saves, and so our task is to be faithful in presenting the gospel to our Muslim friends and trust God with the results.

[Prayer]

[Next class introduction]