Islam & Christianity **Lesson 10**

What is the Islamic dilemma?

The Islamic dilemma is an argument Christians present to Muslims. The term refers to a logical conflict rooted in claims that the Quran—Islam's most sacred book—makes about the Bible. The tension comes from the Quran's claim that the Bible is God's Word (Quran 3:3–4; 5:46–47; 10:94). Yet it also alleges that Jews and Christians changed the Bible, leading to historical and theological errors (Quran 2:75; 3:78; 5:13). Both claims cannot be true at the same time. If the Bible is God's Word, then it must be true. But if it's corrupt, the Quran cannot affirm it. Christians call this contradiction the Islamic dilemma.

The Quran affirms the divine origin of Scripture in passages that mention the Torah—the first five books of the Old Testament—and the Gospel. It refers to them as guidance from God. The Quran says that God "revealed the Torah and the Gospel . . . as guidance for the people" (Quran 3:3–4). It also says that the Gospel contains "guidance and light" (Quran 5:46) and that the people of the Gospel should "judge by what Allah has revealed therein" (Quran 5:47). Historically, the only completely trustworthy record of the Gospel is the New Testament witness rooted in the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The Quran's teaching about the Bible challenges Muslims to consider what it says about Jesus Christ or risk rejecting the authority of their faith's most sacred book. Notably, the Gospels and other New Testament writings reveal that Jesus is the eternal Son of God (John 1:1–2, 14; Colossians 1:15–17; Hebrews 1:1–3). They also teach that He died for sin (1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 Peter 2:24; Romans 5:8) and rose from the dead three days later (1 Corinthians 15:4; Luke 24:6; Acts 2:32). Jesus also taught He is the only way to God. He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6; cf. Acts 4:12).

These facts lead to a logical contradiction for Muslims. The Quran says the Bible is guidance from God, yet it rejects its message about Jesus. This is a self-refuting statement—that is, it contradicts itself. To be clear, it's not another document refuting the Quran; the book contradicts its own claims. Therefore, a reader cannot accept both positions at once. If the Bible's message is true, then the Quran's denial of its trustworthiness is in error. If the Bible is corrupt, then the Quran's affirmation of it is in error.

What Jesus said about Himself and what His followers preached and wrote about Him stands in direct conflict with statements in the Quran. In the Gospels, Jesus declares He is the Son of God (John 10:36), but the Quran denies that God has a Son (Quran 112:3; 19:35). The Gospels also record Jesus receiving worship as God (John 20:28), but the Quran rejects the idea that Jesus is God (Quran 4:171; 5:116). Jesus predicted His death and resurrection (Mark 8:31), but the Quran asserts that Jesus was neither killed nor crucified (Quran 4:157). Jesus said He is the only way to God (John 14:6), but the Quran teaches that salvation comes through submitting to Allah and doing good deeds (Quran 2:112).

These examples show that the Bible's claims about Jesus and the Quran's teachings cannot both be true at the same time. To fully embrace the Quran, Muslims must either conclude that its statements about the Bible are incorrect, which would mean the Quran contains an error, or accept its affirmation of the Bible as true and live with the resulting logical contradictions between the two books' teachings.

The historical record further strengthens the Islamic dilemma. The New Testament offers multiple eyewitness testimonies to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection written when those who heard and saw Him were still living. In contrast, the Quran's statements about Jesus—written over 600 years later—are internally inconsistent and lack independent textual or historical foundation.

All 66 books of the Bible are internally consistent. They are without error or contradiction in all they affirm about Jesus, people, morality, sin, salvation, history, science, and more (2 Timothy 3:16–17; John 17:17). In contrast, the Quran's teaching cannot be harmonized with the Bible or even with itself.

Why do Muslim women have to wear a hijab?

The word *hijab* means "curtain" or "hiding, obstructing" in Arabic. *Hijab* can also refer to the Islamic dress code itself, in which case it conveys the level of modesty displayed by a Muslim woman. In the Islamic tradition, women wear scarves (hijabs), which cover their hair and frame their faces as a form of modesty when in the presence of men who are not close relatives. Depending upon the country and the Islamic influence of the region, this wearing of headscarves and other loose-fitting clothing also called hijab may be either legally enforced or considered a woman's choice.

As a dress code, the hijab can require anything from a simple hair scarf to a total body cover that allows only eye slits. The various articles of clothing that hijab might demand are as follows:

• The hijab is a square scarf that covers the head and neck, but leaves the face free. This is the most common type of covering seen in America.
• The shayla is a long, rectangular scarf that covers the head but often leaves the face and neck free.
• The khimar is a long, cape-like scarf that wraps around the head and hangs to the middle of the back. It covers the head, neck, and shoulders but leaves the face clear.
• The chador is a long cloak that covers a woman's entire body all the way to her feet.
• The niqab covers the mouth and nose but leaves the eyes clear. It is worn with a khimar or other head scarf.
• The burqa covers the entire face and body, leaving a small mesh screen through which the woman can see.

All of these manners of dress are considered hijab, and in some Muslim cultures they are optional. Some Muslim women claim that wearing the hijab helps others focus upon their intelligence and character, rather than judging external characteristics such as wealth, beauty, or sexuality. From the Al-Islam website, which calls itself "a site of Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Da'wah and Guidance in Saudi Arabia," the purpose for a woman wearing a hijab is to free her from the lustful gazes of men. The hijab (and other loose-fitting garments) limit the attention on the female body and redirect it to the face.

This sentiment contains hints of the truth of 1 Peter 3:3–4, which says, "Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight." An Islamic woman is taught that the enjoyment of her beauty is for her husband only, so many Muslim women consider the hijab a way to honor their husbands as well as show devotion to their religion.

However, other devout Muslim women object to the mandatory hijab, stating that such a requirement is found nowhere in the Qur'an. While acknowledging that modesty is required, they argue that the more extreme interpretations of the Quranic verses only vilify women as objects of male lust. They challenge this

condescending view of women, stating that *hijab* in the Qur'an refers to "separation or division," not a headscarf. They point to history where dictatorial and political Islam imposed this rule in efforts to gain control over a people and subjugate its women. When Islamic extremists take over a region, they usually impose hijab for women right away. So some Muslim women see the hijab as a reinforcement of Islam's reputation for oppressing and silencing women.

The argument over hijab illustrates the futility of religion in our attempts to please God. Religion always imposes external behaviors on its followers, using fear or false hope as the incentive. The Jews in Jesus' day were creating external rules for others and insisting that no one could know God without following them to the letter (Matthew 15:9). When Jesus Christ came, He shattered those requirements of human tradition (Matthew 15:2) and fulfilled the divine Law on our behalf (Matthew 5:17; Galatians 3:10–11, 24; Romans 3:28). Whether women wear hijab or men pray five times a day, no one can please God except through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ (John 3:16–18; 14:6; 20:31; Romans 3:20; 8:8).

God's Word gives us guidance in how to live, but we seek holiness because we want to please God, not in order to be accepted by Him. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not the Allah of Islam (1 Corinthians 8:5–6). In Jesus' high priestly prayer, He said, "Now this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent" (John 17:3). Being His disciples (Luke 9:23) means we desire to obey Him, while recognizing the impossibility of doing so at all times. The beauty of Christianity is grace (Ephesians 2:8–9). Islam cannot offer grace. Hijab cannot offer grace. All the good works of every religion are worthless without new life in Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 10:9–10).

Is Jesus God's Son? How could Allah, being one, have a Son?

Muslims ask, "How could Allah, being one, have a Son?" Misunderstanding the Trinity, they sometimes charge Christians with worshiping three gods. However, Christians believe that only one true God exists.

Jesus Himself upheld monotheism. When asked for the greatest command, Jesus responded, ". . . The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:29-30).

Jesus taught that God is one, and Jesus taught that He was one with God (John

10:30). In response, the Jews picked up stones to stone Jesus because they thought He was guilty of blasphemy. Similarly, Muslims would say a man claiming to be God would be guilty of "shirk." However, Jesus is not a mere man claiming to be God. He is the Son of God in human flesh (John 10:36-38).

The title "Son of God" does not mean Jesus was literally born from God. The Bible does not teach a physical relationship between God and Mary, as Muslims sometimes charge. As he announced the birth of Jesus, the angel told the virgin Mary:

". . . 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. . . . of his kingdom there will be no end.' And Mary said to the angel, 'How will this be, since I am a virgin?' And the angel answered her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God'" (Luke 1:30-35).

Pastor John MacArthur explains these verses: "Since a son bears his father's qualities, calling a person someone else's 'son' was a way of signifying equality. Here the angel was telling Mary that her Son would be equal to the Most High God" (*The MacArthur Study Bible*).

Man's testimony that Jesus is God's Son
When people witnessed Jesus' miracles, teaching, death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven, many believed Jesus is the Son of God.

• Followers of Jesus testified after He calmed a storm: "And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God'" (Matthew 14:32-33).

• Peter testified: "Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven'" (Matthew 16:13-17).

• A woman, whose brother Jesus raised to life, testified: "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world'" (John 11:25-27).

• Even the demons know Jesus is the Son of God: "Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the Son of God'" (Mark 3:11).

• A military officer and soldiers who were guarding Jesus at His death on the cross testified: "When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" (Matthew 27:54).

• Thomas testified after Jesus rose from the dead: "Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.' Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.' Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:24-31).

Jesus' own testimony that He is God's Son

• "This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill [Jesus], because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. So Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor

the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life'" (John 5:18-24).

• At Jesus' trial, He testified: ". . . Again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' And Jesus said, 'I am, and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven'" (Mark 14:61-62).

• "We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true—even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20).

God's testimony that Jesus is His Son

• God spoke at Jesus' baptism: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17).

• "While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, 'This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him'" (Luke 9:34-35).

• "If we receive the testimony of men, the testimony of God is greater, for this is the testimony of God that he has borne concerning his Son. Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:9-13).

• Previously, God had spoken to man through His prophets, but then He sent His own Son: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers by the prophets at many times and in various ways. But in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son whom He has appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" (Hebrews 1:1-3).

Jesus is the “exact representation” of God. Although one with His Father in essence, Jesus is also distinct in Person as God’s Son. God has revealed Himself as one God manifest in three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Even before the world began, Jesus was always with God and was God (John 1:1-2; 17:5). God created all things in the universe through Jesus (John 1:3; Colossians 1:15-20).

Although eternally one with God, Jesus came to earth in the form of man (Philippians 2:5-11). Born to the virgin Mary, Jesus is fully God and fully man at the same time (the incarnation: Matthew 1:22-23; John 1:14; Romans 1:3-4; Colossians 2:9; 1 John 4:1-3; 5:20).

Believe in the Son of God

We must believe God’s Word that Jesus is God’s Son, even though it’s hard to understand. We will die with many hard questions unanswered. But we dare not die without responding to God’s promise of judgment and salvation through His Son (John 3:35-36; 5:25-29; Acts 10:38-43; 17:30-31; 1 John 4:14-15).

As the perfect Son of God, Jesus didn’t deserve the punishment for sin, death (Romans 6:23). But by dying on the cross and rising from the dead, Jesus paid the penalty of sin and broke the power of sin for those who would be in Him (Romans 8:1-3).

God is calling sinners to turn from their own way to follow the living Lord Jesus in repentance and faith (Luke 24:46-47). We cannot save ourselves. Only those who turn from sin and trust in the Son of God are saved from sin and eternal death.

“God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:16-18).