

Christianity vs Islam – Lesson 3

Why don't Christians fast the same as Muslims?

Both Muslims and Christians fast, but their purposes for fasting differ. To keep one of the Five Pillars, a Muslim is obligated to fast during Ramadan.

The Bible teaches that fasting merits neither God's favor nor a place in paradise. Christians may fast for one of the following reasons:

- To demonstrate their satisfaction in God (Matthew 4:4)
- To humble themselves before God (Daniel 9:3)
- To request God's help (2 Samuel 12:16; Esther 4:16; Ezra 8:23)
- To seek God's will (Acts 13:2-3)
- To turn from sin (Jonah 3:5-10)
- To worship God without distractions (Luke 2:36-38)

Jesus Fasted

At the beginning of Jesus' public ministry, before His great miracles and teaching, He fasted forty days. Afterwards, the devil tested Jesus while He was weak with hunger: *And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ... Again, the Devil took Him up into a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"* Then the Devil left him. And behold, angels came and ministered to Him. Matthew 4:2, 8-11 (ESV)

Although Satan tempted Jesus to sin, Jesus remained perfect, unlike all other human beings in history.

• Don't fast to appear religious before men

"And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you." Matthew 6:16-18 (ESV)

• Don't fast to earn forgiveness of sin

(A Pharisee is one who belonged to a religious, fundamental sect of the Jews.)

"The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not

even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke 18:11-14

Jesus taught that we cannot earn entrance to heaven through fasting. Our sin renders even our best religious deeds unworthy ([Isaiah 64:6](#)).

Jesus’ transformation of fasting

Jesus taught that following God’s will brings more satisfaction than eating: *...His disciples were asking Him, saying, “Master, eat.” But He said to them, “I have food to eat which you do not know.” Therefore, the disciples said to one another, “No one brought Him anything to eat?” Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work.” John 4:31-34*

What is God’s will? *And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes on Me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you also have seen Me and do not believe. All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will in no way cast out. For I came down from Heaven, not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all which He has given Me I should lose nothing but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes on Him should have everlasting life. And I will raise him up at the last day.” John 6:35-40*

Just as we will die if we don’t eat, we will die (i.e., be separated from God eternally in hell) if we don’t receive Jesus, the Bread of Life. Because He came “down from heaven,” born of a virgin, Jesus called God His Father. Jesus proved by His perfect life, death, and resurrection that He is divine, the Son of God. Jesus fulfilled His Father’s will: saving believing sinners by taking their punishment for sin on the cross. By raising Jesus from the dead, God showed that He accepted Christ’s sacrifice.

How do you receive the Bread of Life? You must turn from sin and trust in the Lord Jesus’ death and resurrection to save you—not your own goodness through works such as fasting.

After saving you from sin, the Lord will give you the desire and strength to glorify God through good works—even fasting: *But now, being made free from sin, and having become slaves to God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. [Romans 6:22-23](#)*

Are There Different Versions of Islam?

Every time there is an instance of Islamic terrorism, we hear debates about what Islam teaches. Many Muslims say that Islam is a peaceful religion and that anyone who commits violence in the name of Islam is following a perversion of Islam. On the other hand, radical Muslims declare that any Muslims who will not employ violence to further the cause of Islam are following a perversion of Islam. So, which side is correct?

A brief Islamic history lesson will help to properly understand the dichotomy:

(**Note:** the following is a condensed and likely over-simplified description of the events)

- Muhammad, the founder of Islam, initially began preaching his message in the city of Mecca. In the beginning, Muhammad's message was one of peace. He wanted to convert Jews, Christians, and polytheists to his version of monotheism. His new revelations were not accepted, for the most part, by the populace. Muhammad gained a small following but was eventually forced to flee from Mecca.
- Muhammad fled to Medina, where again, his message was not well received. But Muhammad steadily grew a devoted following. Once this following of first-generation Muslims grew powerful, it turned to violence in order to achieve its goals. The previous message of peace was virtually discarded and convert or die became the modus operandi. Muhammad and his followers took control of Medina, and then returned and conquered Mecca.
- The Qur'an contains record of the revelations, primarily peaceful, that Muhammad received when he was in Mecca. The Qur'an also contains record of the revelations, often violent, that Muhammad received when he was in Medina. Some Islamic scholars argue that the violent verses must be interpreted in the context of the seventh century Middle Eastern culture and/or that they only advocate violence for defense or in response to severe persecution. Other Muslim scholars claim that the newer revelations from Medina supersede the older revelations from Mecca and that therefore the violent version of Islam is the true version.

So, which version of Islam is correct, Mecca Islam or Medina Islam? Who is correct about how to properly interpret the Qur'an, the peaceful Muslims or the violent Muslims?

The Surahs (chapters) in the Qur'an are not organized chronologically, but by the longest Surah to the shortest Surah. It is very difficult to understand without knowing the context and background of each Surah. If Muslims ever produce a "study Qur'an" and/or a "chronological Qur'an," it would be easier to discern.

There are millions of Muslims who believe the Mecca/peaceful approach to be true Islam, and there are millions of Muslims who believe the Medina/violent approach to be true Islam. Apparently, both are plausible interpretations of the Qur'an, and therefore, valid versions of Islam. Significant numbers of Muslims either publicly or privately endorse the Medina version of Islam. It is not a perversion of Islam, rather it is a part of Islam. It is a result of Muhammad quickly abandoning his message of peace once he met some resistance.

The majority of Muslims are peaceful, with no desire for violence and/or acts of terrorism. There is far more about peace and submission to Allah in the Qur'an than there is about violence. But the Qur'an does indeed teach violence. The Qur'an does contain verses that can, fairly easily, be employed to support terrorism.

If Christians only read the book of Judges, it could lead them to believe that violence was God's way of accomplishing His will. The Old Testament contains much violence. God commanded the Israelites to commit acts of warfare and violence in the Old Testament. But the vast majority of Christians (aside from the ever-present Judaizers) understand that the Old Testament is descriptive, in that we are to learn from it (1 Corinthians 10:6-11), but not prescriptive, in that it is not a message that Christians are to follow (Romans 10:4; Galatians 3:23-25; Ephesians 2:15).

The New Testament nowhere instructs Christians to resort to violence. The kingdom of Christ is about salvation and spiritual transformation (Romans 12:1-2). His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36; Luke 17:21).

The Qur'an is the opposite. It began as a message of peace but quickly turned violent. Muhammad initially attempted to reason people into his peaceful version of monotheism. When that didn't work, he resorted to violence. Historically speaking, violence has always been a core aspect of Islam. It has virtually always been invading and oppressing. Islamic terrorism is simply Islam's violent tendencies applied to the modern easy availability of guns and explosives.

Which version of Islam is the perversion? Both. It does not matter which version of Islam is the true version of Islam. Both are perversions...of the truth. Islam is ultimately a false message about a false god taught by a false prophet.

Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God?

The Muslim and Christian views of God have some similarities. Christians believe in

one eternal God Who created the universe, and Muslims apply these attributes to Allah. Both view God as all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-present.

A vital difference between the Islamic and Christian views of God is the biblical concept of the Trinity. In the Bible, God has revealed Himself as one God in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. While each Person of the Trinity is fully God, God is not three gods but three in one.

God's Son came in the form of man, a truth called the incarnation (Luke 1:30-35; John 1:14; Colossians 2:9; 1 John 4:1-3). The Lord Jesus Christ conquered the penalty and power of sin by dying on the cross (Romans 6:23). After rising from the dead, Jesus went back to heaven to be with His Father and sent the Holy Spirit to believers (Acts 1:8-11). One day, Christ will return to judge and rule (Acts 10:42, 43). Those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus will live with Him, but those who refuse to follow Him must be separated in hell from the holy God.

"The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." John 3:35-36 Either Jesus bears the wrath of God for your sin on the cross or you bear the wrath of God for your sin in hell (1 Peter 2:24).

The Trinity is essential to the Christian faith. Without the Trinity, there would be no incarnation of God's Son in the Person of Jesus Christ. Without Jesus Christ, there would be no salvation from sin. Without salvation, sin would condemn all to an eternal hell.

So, do Christians and Muslims worship the same God? A better question is, "Do Christians and Muslims both have a correct understanding of who God is?" To this question, the answer is definitely no. Because of crucial differences between the Christian and Muslim concepts of God, the two faiths cannot both be true.

The biblical God alone addresses and solves the problem of sin by giving His Son.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. John 3:16-18